Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qurʾān

History of Christian-Muslim Relations

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VOLUME 13

Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qurʾān

By
Gordon Nickel

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2011

Cover illustration: painting from the *Akbarnāma* depicting the visit of Fathers Rudolph Acquaviva and Anthony Monserrat to the Mughal court in Fatehpur-Sikri in response to the emperor Akbar's request to "send me two learned Fathers, and the books of the Law, especially the Gospel, that I may know the Law and its excellence […]" (1579).

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nickel, Gordon D.
Narratives of tampering in the earliest commentaries on the Qur'an / by Gordon Nickel.
p. cm. — (History of Christian-Muslim relations ; v. 13)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-19238-6 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. Koran—Criticism, interpretation, etc.—History. 2. Koran—Criticism, Textual. I. Title. II. Series.

BP130.45.N53 2011
297.1'22609021—dc22

2010044682

ISSN 1570-7350
ISBN 978 90 04 19238 6 (hardback)
ISBN 978 90 04 19239 3 (e-book)

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FOREWORD

The purpose of the present study is to describe and analyze early Muslim understandings of verses in the Qurʾān which Muslim polemicists have used to support the Islamic accusation of scriptural falsification. The Islamic accusation of the falsification of pre-Qurʾānic scriptures is an active theme in Muslim/non-Muslim encounter today. The accusation also relates closely to the development of Islamic identity, both in how Islam initially sought attestation in the Torah and Gospel, and in the way it eventually set itself apart from Judaism and Christianity. For nearly a decade I heard the accusation of falsification in its contemporary form from friends in South Asia. It was then a great privilege to be able to investigate what Muslim exegetes of the formative period of *tafsīr* wrote about the Qurʾānic "tampering verses" which are frequently associated with the Islamic accusation. Early Muslim understandings point toward an overarching narrative framework of Jewish perfidy and obstinacy, and I have traced the outlines of that framework in this study. However, the results of my research also bear significant implications for interfaith conversation and for the dating of the formulation of the Islamic accusation of falsification.

A number of fine scholars have helped me in the research and writing of this book. Andrew Rippin, Professor of History at the University of Victoria, Canada, guided me through the research as PhD supervisor and has helped me keep in step with scholarly work on Muqātil. During PhD research, I consulted Kees Versteegh, Professor of Arabic, and Harald Motzki, Professor of Islamic Studies, at the Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen. Camilla Adang, Senior Lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University, read my PhD dissertation and offered many helpful suggestions (and some corrections!). Jane Dammen McAuliffe, President of Bryn Mawr College, and Gerhard Böwering, Professor of Religious Studies and Islamic Studies at Yale University, read portions of the manuscript and offered valuable recommendations for revision. Martin Whittingham, director of the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies in Oxford, read chapter 6 closely and offered many helpful suggestions. I would also like to thank Brill's two anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions.

Other scholars who have encouraged me in my research and writing are Irving Hexham, University of Calgary, Shahid ʿAli ʿAbbasi, Osmania University (Hyderabad), Nicolai Sinai, Corpus Coranicum project (Berlin), Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, University of Cordoba, and David Thomas, University of Birmingham. I am deeply grateful to all of these scholars for the time and attention they gave to my research. I am also very thankful to my wife Gwenyth for letting me incorporate this research and writing into our life together (and for listening to my monologues on Muqātil, even though she frequently used them to cure her insomnia).

Initial discoveries in the commentary of Muqātil were published as "Muqâtil ibn Sulaymân on the verses of 'tampering'" in *Islamic Culture* 76/3 (2002). A summary of chapter 4 was presented at the Fifth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium in Birmingham in September 2005, and subsequently published as "Early Muslim Accusations of Taḥrīf: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's commentary on key Qurʾānic verses," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (David Thomas, ed., Leiden: Brill, 2007). I have enjoyed every aspect of the research and writing of this book, and some of my most pleasant times of writing were in peaceful cottages in the Palni Hills of southern India and on the mountain slope above Vernon, British Columbia. I thank the Kodaikanal International School and Fairhaven Ministries, respectively, for making this possible.

Qurʾānic translations generally follow Arthur J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted*, though in some cases I have given my own literal rendering of the Arabic. Qurʾān references are indicated by "Q" followed by *sūra* number and verse number. There are a number of works that appear frequently in footnotes throughout the book. These works are indicated by the following abbreviations:

Tafsīr Muqātil = Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta, ed. Beirut: Mūʾsasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabiyya, 2002, 5 volumes.

Jāmiʿ al-Bayān = Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, eds. Second edition. Cairo, 1955–69, 16 volumes (incomplete).

Arabic-English Lexicon = Edward William Lane. *An Arabic-English Lexicon: Derived from the best and most copious Eastern sources*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1863.

EI2 = *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition. H.A.R. Gibb *et al.*, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2002, 11 volumes.
EQ = *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, gen. ed. Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006, five volumes.
WKAS = Manfred Ullman, ed. *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache.* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983–.
ZDMG = *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1847–).

Gordon Nickel
Vancouver
November 2010

CHAPTER ONE

ISLAMIC ACCUSATIONS OF FALSIFICATION IN SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVE

The Islamic doctrine of the corruption of pre-Qurʾānic scriptures is a common topic of interfaith conversation wherever in the world Muslims meet with Jews and Christians today. The origins and development of this doctrine have been topics of academic curiosity ever since the beginning of the scholarly investigation of Muslim polemic.

Some scholars have argued that the doctrine of corruption began with the words of the Qurʾān. They indicate a group of verses in the Qurʾān which refer to various actions of tampering. Other scholars have argued that the Qurʾān itself does not make an accusation of the corruption of previous scriptures, but rather that the accusation arose in the course of Muslim encounter with Jews and Christians and was brought into the interpretation of the 'tampering verses.' This argument over the Qurʾānic origin of the doctrine can be investigated by studying what the earliest Muslim exegetes understood the 'tampering verses' to mean. Research into early commentary on these verses in turn leads into a fascinating world of Muslim claims of authority and the responses to these claims by other faith communities.

Muslims believe that somehow, at some time in the past, Jews and Christians 'altered' or 'falsified' the revelations which God gave them, so that their scriptures are now 'corrupted.' The doctrine of scriptural corruption, known in Arabic by the term *taḥrīf*, is all but ubiquitous in the Muslim world. In Kate Zebiri's survey of Muslim popular literature on Christianity, all of the authors who write on the subject of scripture claim that the text of the Bible is corrupt.[1] Zebiri writes that

[1] *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 50. The list of 18 popular works surveyed is made up of sources which were available in Muslim bookstores in the West. Zebiri notes that some Muslims who participate in inter-faith dialogue question the traditional opinion on *taḥrīf*, denying that there was any question of conscious or deliberate falsification. *Muslims and Christians*, 163. However, these authors are not among the most popular. The writings of Ahmed Deedat, which have gained more exposure worldwide than those of any other Muslim writer, are so combative on this and other subjects that Zebiri declines to include them in her

among contemporary Muslims the doctrine of the textual corruption of the former scriptures is "virtually unchallenged."[2] The effects which this doctrine has had on conversation among people of faith in the three great monotheistic communities can well be imagined.[3]

However, the doctrine has attracted western scholarly scrutiny for a variety of other reasons. Ignaz Goldziher wrote that the question of scriptural falsification was "the central point of Muslim polemic"—an essential key to tracing the development of theological polemic against the *Ahl al-kitāb*.[4] John Wansbrough wrote in a similar vein that the doctrine of *taḥrīf* was "destined to bear the major burden of Muslim

survey. *Muslims and Christians*, 58. Philip Lewis does provide a description of Deedat's attacks on the Bible, and notes that this kind of polemic has received both financial support from Saudi Arabia and moral and logistical support from Muslims living in the West. "Depictions of 'Christianity' within British Islamic Institutions," in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, Lloyd Ridgeon, ed. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 211–215.

[2] *Muslims and Christians*, 6. M.Y.S. Haddad writes that in a survey of contemporary Arab authors, the majority believe that "the original book revealed to Moses was no longer in existence at the time of Muhammad." Only one author was found to disagree. *Arab Perspectives of Judaism. A Study of Image Formation in the Writings of Muslim Arab Authors 1948–1978* (Thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984), 91. Martin Accad states it most directly: "If you are a Muslim living in the twenty-first century, you take for granted that the Scriptures of Jews and Christians have been corrupted (*ḥurrifat*)." "Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible: The story of the Islâmic usage of taḥrîf," *Theological Review* 24/2 (2003), 67.

[3] David S. Powers writes, "The doctrine of scriptural distortion...has contributed to the tendency of Muslims and Jews to disregard and ignore one another's scriptures." "Reading/Misreading One Another's Scriptures: Ibn Ḥazm's Refutation of Ibn Nagrella al-Yahūdī," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 109. W. Montgomery Watt suggested that when Muslims encountered religious disagreements with the conquered peoples, the doctrine of corruption "made it easy to rebuff any arguments based by Christians on the Bible." *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991): 30. Hugh Goddard's study shows that ancient arguments against the authenticity of the Bible continue in modern Egypt. "The Persistence of Medieval Themes in Modern Christian-Muslim Discussion in Egypt," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, Samir Khalil Samir & Jørgen S. Nielsen, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 226–7. The dynamic of Muslim polemic in contexts outside of the Middle East is well portrayed by Joseph Kenny and S. Babs Mala in "Muslim Use of Christian Scriptures," *West Africa Religion* 18 (1978), 31–41. But these may be only the milder effects of the doctrine. M.Y.S. Haddad argues that contemporary Arab authors use their assertion of the corruption of the Torah to construct a politically-motivated—and deeply negative—image of the Jews. *Arab Perspectives of Judaism*, 118–119.

[4] "Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb," *ZDMG* 32 (1878), 363, 364, cf. 344.

external polemic."[5] The theme of *taḥrīf*, along with the associated doctrine of abrogation, has also been found to be a revealing motif in the development of Islamic self-identity.[6] That process required Islam to measure itself against the previous, existing religions, as well as to set itself apart from them.

On a wider canvas, Moshe Perlmann and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh have portrayed the falsification charge as a popular polemical theme which had been circulating amongst other religious communities at the time of—and prior to—the rise of Islam.[7] Wansbrough has included the doctrine of *taḥrīf* in a list of basic themes of Muslim polemic which could be seen to have been adopted and adapted from their use among Jewish and Christian communities in the Middle East at the time of the emergence of Islam.[8] Other scholars have described and discussed the accusation of falsification as it occurred in intra-Muslim polemic concerning the status of the Qurʾān between Shīʿī and Sunni scholars in the early centuries of Islam.[9]

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[5] *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 41. More recently Kate Zebiri writes that the main areas of Muslim polemic have been "scriptural integrity and the related accusation of suppressing predictions of Muḥammad." "Polemic and Polemical Language," *EQ* (2004), Vol. 4, 123.

[6] *The Sectarian Milieu*, 109f.

[7] Moshe Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, S.D. Goitein, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 106. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19–20. Cf. Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literature in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1887), 320. Tor Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le Christianisme* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955), 202–204; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 191; *idem.*, *Sectarian Milieu*, 41, 109; Jean-Louis Déclais, *Les premiers Musulmans face à la tradition biblique: trois récits sur Job* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 99 n. 38.

[8] *Sectarian Milieu*, 40–44. See also Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of *Qurʾān, Tafsīr*, and *Sīra*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 157.

[9] W. St. Clair Tisdall, "The Shīʿah Additions to the Koran," *The Moslem World* 3 (1913), 227–241. Theodor Nöldeke [Friedrich Schwally], *Geschichte des Qorāns*, second edition (Leipzig, 1919), Vol. 2, 93–112. Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden, 1920), 280–289. But cf. A. Falaturi, "Die Zwölfer-Schia aus der Sicht eines Schiiten: Probleme ihrer Untersuchung," in *Festschrift Werner Caskel* (Leiden, 1968), 91–5; Joseph Eliash, "'The Šīʿīte Qurʾān': A Reconsideration of Goldziher's Interpretation," *Arabica* 16 (1969), 15–24; and Hossein Modarressi, "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qurʾān," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993), 5–39. Other important studies include Etan Kohlberg, "Some Notes on the Imāmite Attitude to the Qurʾān," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition, Essays Presented to*

How did the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of pre-Qurʾānic scriptures come into being? Was it an understanding which the first generations of Muslims shared? How did it develop into the hardened accusation which is made so readily by many Muslims today? This study makes a contribution toward the discussion of how the doctrine of the corruption of earlier scriptures developed in Islam.[10] Its area of focus is the development of the tampering motif by Muslim exegetes in the formative period of Qurʾānic exegesis. That development is traced through direct literary analysis of commentaries on the Qurʾān written by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767)[11] and Abū Jaʿfar ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). The investigation will centre on the explanations in those commentaries of all of the verses in Muslim scripture which are commonly connected with the doctrine of scriptural corruption.

Through the investigation of the operation of a single theme in selected works of *tafsīr*, this study is secondly a contribution toward knowledge of the earliest period of Qurʾānic commentary, from the second to the fourth Islamic centuries. This area of research has been opened up in recent decades through the publication—indeed, some-

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R. Walzer, S.M. Stern *et al.*, eds. (Oxford, 1972), 209–224. Etan Kohlberg and Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Révélation et falsification. Introduction à l'édition du *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt* d'al-Sayyārī," *Journal asiatique* 293 (2005/2), 663–722. Etan Kohlberg and Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, eds., *Revelation and Falsification, The* Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt *of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Shīʿī *tafsīr*," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 183, 189–192. Meir M. Bar-Asher, "Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Shīʿa to the Quran," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 39–74. *Idem.*, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden, 1999). *Idem.*, "Shīʿism and the Qurʾān," *EQ* (2004), Vol. 4, 593–604. Rainer Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung* (Würzburg: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 2001). For recent Shīʿī discussion of early Shīʿī accusations of *taḥrif* against the Qurʾān see *idem.*, "The Dispute about the Falsification of the Qurʾān between Sunnīs and Shīʿīs in the 20th Century," in *Studies in Arabic and Islam* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2002), 437–446.

[10] Watt wrote in 1991, "There has so far been no detailed study of the way in which this doctrine of corruption was elaborated." *Muslim-Christian encounters*, 33. Martin Accad writes, "It is true that *taḥrīf* became *eventually* a central point of debate between Muslim and Christian polemicists, but it might be useful to attempt to trace its entry into the Islamic discourse in order to determine the exact nature of the argument." (Accad's italics) "The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse of the Ninth to the Fourteenth Centuries: An exegetical inventorial table," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14 (2003), 72.

[11] The notation 'd. 150/767' means 'died in 150 A.H./767 A.D.'

times even discovery—of early *tafsīr* works. It is a new field wide open to the exploration of language, themes and movements in early Islam. The formative period of Qurʾānic interpretation is a largely unexplored area of academic research. A great number of interesting possibilities present themselves to the scholar.[12] Thus far, relatively little scholarly work has been done on the early commentaries.

Exploring the *tafsīr* works from the formative period involves discovering how the earliest Muslim exegetes developed meaning from the text of Muslim scripture. The main lines of their methodology become visible as the development of a motif such as tampering is traced through the commentaries. At the same time, the commentaries give intimations of how each exegete's methodology influences his interaction with the text of scripture. The commentaries to be examined are part of the literary record of the development of Islamic identity in the second to fourth Islamic centuries. This investigation therefore, thirdly, makes a contribution to the study of the intellectual history of early Islam.

Chapter two of this study will present a summary of major scholarly studies on the doctrine of *taḥrīf*, followed by a characterization of general trends in how Muslim scholars have understood the theme of tampering over the course of the Muslim tradition. These descriptions will make clear that the doctrine has been linked with verses from the Qurʾān. This leads naturally to an indication of the particular verses which scholars have connected with the doctrine. The commentaries to be examined in this study, along with their authors, will also be introduced in chapter two.

The exploration of the tampering motif will begin in chapter three with a survey of the Qurʾānic references to the earlier scriptures, as well as of verbs and other expressions from the Qurʾān's semantic field of tampering. This is necessary because—as quickly becomes apparent from familiarity with the commentaries—the exegetes wrote within the context of the Qurʾān's verbal atmosphere. Chapters four and five will describe and analyze the explanations of the relevant 'verses of tampering' in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. These analyses will conclude with concise summaries of the commentaries'

[12] "The development of grammar, of theology, of sectarian trends and of mysticism are all potentially traceable through a close analysis of these early works." Andrew Rippin, "The Present Status of Tafsir Studies," *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), 230.

understandings of the most important Qurʾānic verbs and expressions of tampering.

Chapters six and seven will follow the direction set in the analyses by pursuing indications in the commentaries of a narrative structure looming over the development of the tampering theme. There the argument will be made that the methodology of exegesis practiced by 'narrative' commentators exerts an influence on the meanings derived from the text of scripture. The final chapter will consolidate the findings of description and analysis, and suggest directions which may be fruitfully pursued in further research on the basis of those findings.

This introductory chapter will now proceed into the question of whether the accusation of falsification can indeed be found in the Qurʾān itself. The rationale for exploring the development of the tampering theme through works of Qurʾānic commentary will then be presented. The methodology appropriate to such an investigation is set forth as literary analysis. Finally, in response to some common scholarly characterizations of both the relationship of the Qurʾān to falsification accusations and of early Muslim understandings of the tampering verses, the thesis for this study will be articulated.

Link Between Accusation and Qurʾān?

A number of scholars who have studied the verses in the Qurʾān relevant to the tampering theme have made the claim that the words of Muslim scripture themselves do not amount to an accusation of the textual corruption of earlier scriptures. This view made its scholarly appearance in a 1955 article by W.M. Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible."[13]

Watt wrote that a study of the Qurʾānic approach to the earlier scriptures must distinguish between "what the Qurʾān actually says" and "all later interpretations."[14] After an examination of Qurʾānic passages containing verbs and expressions of tampering, he concluded that "the Qurʾān does not put forward any general view of the corruption of the text of the Old and New Testaments."[15] There are clear accusations in the Qurʾān that passages in the Bible were concealed, Watt wrote,

[13] *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 16 (1955–56), 50–62.
[14] "The Early Development," 50.
[15] "The Early Development," 53.

and indeed there are also accusations of *taḥrīf* in the Qurʾān. But by this, the Qurʾān "does not mean tampering with the written text," he claimed.[16]

A similar statement of this position has also come from the Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub:

> Contrary to the general Islamic view, the Qurʾan does not accuse Jews and Christians of altering the text of their scriptures, but rather of altering the truth which those scriptures contain. The people do this by concealing some of the sacred texts, by misapplying their precepts, or by "altering words from their right position." However, this refers more to interpretation than to actual addition or deletion of words from the sacred books.[17]

Watt and Ayoub thus assert that the meaning of the Qurʾānic verses of tampering is different from how those verses came to be interpreted and, indeed, from what came to be the general Islamic view.[18]

A third statement of this position appeared in an important article on "The Corruption of the Scriptures" by John Burton:

> Many non-Muslims are still firmly of the belief that Jews and Christians are accused in the Qurʾān of having tampered with the texts of the revelations to the prophets now collected into the Old and New Testaments of their Bible. This is because they regularly encounter such charges in their reading. The accusation is a commonplace charge levelled against the People of the Book by the Muslims, not, however, because of what

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[16] "The early development," 53. Watt repeated this view in his later book *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, and there added, "Manuscripts of the Bible are still extant which antedate Muḥammad, but there is absolutely no suggestion in the Qurʾān that the whole Bible has been corrupted at some time in the distant past, nor that there had been the collusion between Christians and Jews which would have been necessary in order to corrupt the Old Testament." *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 32.

[17] "ʿUzayr in the Qurʾan and Muslim Tradition," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, W.M. Brinner and S.D. Ricks, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 5. Ayoub immediately adds, "The problem of alteration (*taḥrīf*) needs further study."

[18] Another scholar who made a similar claim was Ignazio Di Matteo. After reviewing the exegetical treatment of key tampering passages in the Qurʾān by Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Di Matteo concluded: "According to the Qurʾān, the text of the holy scriptures has been altered neither before Muḥammad, nor even during his life-time by those Jews and Christians who were not favourably disposed towards his mission. In the Qurʾān *taḥrīf* means either false interpretation of the passages bearing upon Muḥammad or non-enforcement of the explicit laws of the Pentateuch, such as the stoning punishment." "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani," *Bessarione* xxxviii (1922), 96.

> the Qurʾān says, but because of what the Muslims say the Qurʾān says. In other words, it is mere exegesis.[19]

Burton's distinction between "what the Qurʾān says" and what Muslims say, and his characterization of Qurʾānic exegesis as "mere," deserve comment. The question which must be posed is whether it is possible to speak of the meanings of the Qurʾān apart from what its readers or listeners have understood it to mean. In other words, is it possible to speak of "what the Qurʾān says" apart from the tradition of Qurʾānic commentary?

Surely one of the most important scholarly insights in Qurʾānic Studies in recent years is that the style of the Qurʾān is allusive and elliptical.[20] The Qurʾānic text frequently lacks words or units of information which might otherwise be considered essential to a clear expression of meaning. Muslim scripture gives the impression of being addressed to an audience which could supply missing details to which the text only refers.[21] Even narrative in the Qurʾān is "often unintelligible without exegetical complement."[22] In the case of the tampering verses, the reader usually encounters ambiguity about many parts of a sentence, including the identities of the subject and object, and the nature of the central action.[23] As the exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote in expla-

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[19] "The Corruption of the Scriptures," *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies* 4 (1994), 95.

[20] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 1, 42, 57; *idem.*, *Sectarian Milieu*, 24–25. See also Rippin, "Literary analysis of Qurʾān, *Tafsīr*, and *Sīra*," 159–160; and G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48.

[21] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 1.

[22] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 131. Wansbrough characterized Muslim scripture as a "torso" needing completion by the *sīra-maghāzī* literature. *Sectarian Milieu*, 45. Norman Calder prefered the image of a Chinese painting, in which the missing details do indeed need to be filled in—but only according to independent structures. "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 115.

[23] "[The Qurʾān] almost never mentions by name those who ask, challenge, seek guidance, doubt, or abuse, which is one of the reasons the Qurʾān has been named a 'text without a context.'" Stefan Wild, "The Self-Referentiality of the Qurʾān: Sura 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 422. Matthias Radscheit, for example, discusses the "anonymity" of the Qurʾān's polemical passages and concludes that not only is it difficult to be sure of the identity of the prophet's opponents, but also of the identity of the prophet. *Die koranische Herausforderung:*

nation of one of the verses to be examined below, "the literal sense (*ẓāhir*) of the Qurʾān does not indicate what they actually altered."[24]

Development Within Early Commentaries

Therefore, instead of asking whether the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption is to be found in the Qurʾān, the approach of this investigation will be to ask what exegetes have understood the Qurʾānic verses of tampering to mean. The rationale for investigating the tampering theme within works of Qurʾānic commentary alone is related to the importance of the sacred text in Muslim faith and life. In the introduction to her study of the theme of "Qurʾānic Christians" in a succession of *tafsīr* works, Jane McAuliffe notes the remarkable proliferation of attempts throughout Islamic history to understand and appreciate the meanings of the Qurʾān. She suggests that "The sheer size and linguistic coverage of this religious science clearly indicate its centrality and significance for charting the development of Islamic intellectual history."[25] Daud Rahbar also made a strong argument for the importance of *tafsīr*: "Truly speaking, the entire history of Islam is one of exegesis of the Qurʾān; and it is only by viewing the entire history of Islam in its relation to the Qurʾān that we can attain any unity of perspective on that history. All other ways of viewing that history will present a disjoined and fragmentary picture."[26] Investigating the theme of *taḥrīf* in early commentaries on the Qurʾān will therefore reveal an essential part of the history of this idea.

Limiting the scope of research to *tafsīr* works also allows the Qurʾān to serve as a touchstone for the range of meanings. Norman Calder called this phenomenon "the centripetal force of the quranic text."[27] Works in other genres, such as polemic, are free to pursue arguments without constraint.[28] The exegetical tradition, indeed, shows a great

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Die taḥaddī *Verse im Rahmen der Polemikpassagen des Korans* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1996), 14–23.

[24] *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1973), Vol. III, 135.

[25] *Qurʾanic Christians: An analysis of classical and modern exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 8.

[26] "Reflections on the Tradition of Qurʾanic Exegesis," *Muslim World* 52 (1962), 298 (Rahbar's italics).

[27] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 106.

[28] The approach of this study is also distinguished from research on the development of the theme of *taḥrīf* in a variety of genres, such as biography, polemic and

freedom of interplay between the Islamic scholastic disciplines and the text of the Qurʾān. But finally the text of scripture cannot be ignored. The study of commentary thus also facilitates the examination of the views of a professional class of exegetes and its audience. Writers of other genres used many of the materials also found in Qurʾānic commentaries, but only the exegetes were explicitly focused on the interpretation of the Qurʾān.

This study is an exploration of what Muqātil and Ṭabarī wrote about the verses in the Qurʾān which contain verbs and expressions of tampering. These two commentaries are highlighted because each offers an abundance of interesting material related to the 'tampering verses.'[29] This material will then be used to describe the development of the theme of tampering in the two commentaries. The methodology appropriate to the study of themes and motifs in the early commentaries on the Qurʾān is a close reading of the *tafsīr* texts and the analysis of these texts as works of literature. "A *tafsīr*, after all," wrote Norman Calder, "is a work of art."[30] The particular theme will be investigated not only through what the exegetes have to say about individual verses, but also as much as possible within the total context of the commentary. This will then lead to discoveries about the exegetical approach of the commentator, his way of coming at the meaning of the text of scripture, and possible larger concerns of which *taḥrīf* may be only one element.

The approach to the *tafsīr* texts pursued here is one of several possible methodologies for reading the early Qurʾānic commentaries. This investigation traces the development of a theme or motif, in a similar

historical writing in addition to *tafsīr*. Examples of the investigation of several different genres are Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); and Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

[29] The commentaries of Mūqatil and Ṭabarī are the major works of this genre in the formative period, and chapters four and five will document the vast amount of useful material on the tampering theme in these commentaries. Other commentaries from the formative period, such as those of al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/827) and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī (d. 211/827), do not contain sufficient material on the tampering theme to warrant separate treatment. However, the comments of these two early exegetes on the 'tampering verses' will be noted at a number of points.

[30] Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 106. Cf. John Burton: "exegesis is entirely and wholly a literary activity." "Law and exegesis: The penalty for adultery in Islam," in *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 269.

way to how Biblical scholars have researched themes in the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible or New Testament. The goal is not to study the early commentaries in order to isolate and analyze different styles of exegesis, or to trace the use of grammatical terminology, or to look for evidence of the development of the Qurʾān, which other scholars have pursued.

This study is not a search for the "original meaning" of the Qurʾān. The aim is not to demonstrate whether or not corruption has taken place in pre-Qurʾānic scriptures, nor whether the Qurʾān means to say that Jews and Christians falsified their scriptures. Rather, the objective here is to show how two early exegetes interpreted the Qurʾānic verses which have been associated with the accusation of corruption.[31] In particular, the explanations of verses which contain verbs and expressions of tampering will be described and analyzed. The 'development of the tampering theme' in this investigation does not mean a development over time within the entire Muslim community, but rather the development of the theme within each commentary.

Tampering Portrayed Through Narrative

Major scholarly statements on the theme of tampering have characterized the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption as a Qurʾānic accusation, and have stated that the accusation of textual falsification arose very early in Islamic history—indeed was the first view to be held by Muslims. In spite of the referential nature of the Qurʾānic text, and in spite of the scholarly views described earlier that the words of the Qurʾān cannot be understood to mean an accusation of falsification, these scholars write as if the accusation is clearly made in Muslim scripture itself. This position is well typified by the articles on "Taḥrīf" in the first and second editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, to be summarized in chapter two. In the first edition, Frants Buhl wrote about the passages in the Qurʾān "where Muḥammad accused the Jews of falsifying the books of revelation given them, i.e. the Thora,

[31] Herbert Berg makes a comparable distinction in his study of "Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Qurʾānic Term *al-Kitāb*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIII (1995), 761. Berg set himself to explain how Ṭabarī and his authorities understood the word *kitāb*, rather than to say how the term was understood by those who first heard the Qurʾān according to *Sīra* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* accounts.

ḥarrafū."[32] He further wrote that of the possible positions on tampering held by Muslim scholars, it was "the opinion usual in the early centuries after Muḥammad that the Jews had actually altered the text."[33] Buhl explained that the position of textual corruption was decidedly the simplest and most logical, "for it was based on the first impression which the words of the Ḳur'ān naturally made and had made in the early days of Islām."[34] Thus for Buhl, the earliest view was the harsh position articulated by Ibn Ḥazm, to be discussed in chapter two.

This claim that the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption is an accusation which the Qurʾān itself makes continued in the article on "Taḥrīf" published in 1998. Lazarus-Yafeh wrote there, "In the Medinan sūras [the accusation of forgery] is a central theme."[35] Elsewhere she had written, "In the Qurʾān [the accusation that Jews and Christians had falsified their Scriptures] is a central theme."[36] In a further article, she stated, "The contradictions between the Ḳurʾānic and Biblical stories, and the denial of both Jews and Christians that Muḥammad was predicted in their Holy Scriptures, gave rise to the Ḳurʾānic accusation of the falsification of these last by Jews and Christians respectively."[37] The same wording continues into articles published more recently, such as Abdullah Saeed's article, "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures."[38] Saeed begins his article with the comprehensive expression, "the Qur'ānic accusation that the scriptures of the Jews and Christians have been falsified, corrupted,

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32 "Taḥrīf," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma *et al.*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. 4, 618. Buhl added that Muḥammad conceived the accusation when the Jews of Madīna did not acknowledge an attestation of his prophethood from the Torah and instead began to ridicule him.

33 Buhl, "Taḥrīf," 619.

34 Buhl, "Taḥrīf," 619.

35 "Taḥrīf," *EI2* (1998), Vol. 10, 111. Lazarus-Yafeh continued, again with unusual freedom: the accusation was "apparently used to explain away the contradictions between the Bible and the Ḳur'ān and to establish that the coming of the Prophet and the rise of Islam had indeed been predicted in the 'true' scriptures."

36 *Intertwined Worlds*, 20.

37 "Tawrāt," *EI2* (2000), Vol. 10, 394.

38 *Muslim World* 92 (2002), 419–436.

altered and changed."[39] Similar phrases appear in other important scholarly publications.[40]

Quite to the contrary, exegetes from the formative period of Qurʾānic commentary did not in the first instance understand the words of the Qurʾān to mean that Jews and Christians had falsified their scriptures. For these exegetes, the concept of textual corruption was decidedly not "the simplest and most logical," as Buhl claims, nor was it the 'natural impression' which the words of the Qurʾān made on them. On the evidence of the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, the situation was much more complex than Buhl envisioned. The commentaries develop a wide and lively variety of actions of tampering. They have little good to say about the communities to whom God entrusted his revelations in the distant past, and even less good to relate about those who did not accept the claims of the messenger of Islam. But the negative evaluations of the "People of the Book" in the commentaries do not generally attach to the revealed books themselves. Among the actions of tampering which the exegetes describe, they transmit traditions about Jewish falsification of the Torah. However, these traditions remain isolated and seemingly tentative amid an array of other more dominant traditions. The reasons for this, as we shall see, include the constraints of the Qurʾānic material on the earlier scriptures, the vague and ambiguous character of the Qurʾānic references, uncertainties about the meaning of Arabic expressions, and the influence of

[39] Curiously, Saeed's article argues that a selection of classical exegetes did not understand the Qurʾān to be making the accusation of falsification. But even so, he does not qualify his statement at the start of the article.

[40] Another example in a major source is Charles J. Adams: "…the Qurʾān particularly charges the Jews with having 'corrupted' or 'altered' their scriptures…." "Qurʾān: The Text and its History," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 12, 171–172. Many of the articles in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* offer similar expressions about both the Qurʾān and opinions during the early Muslim centuries. One of the most striking of these is from Gordon Darnell Newby: "Post-qurʾānic commentators understood the Qurʾān to regard all scripture of Jews and Christians as corrupted and thereby to be either rejected or understood only through the filter of the Qurʾān itself." "Forgery," *EQ* (2002), Vol. 2, 243. Other examples include Uri Rubin, "Children of Israel," Vol. 1 (2001), 305; Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology and the Qurʾān," Vol. 1 (2001), 318; Frederick Denny, "Corruption," Vol. 1 (2001), 440; Shari Lowin, "Revision and Alteration," Vol. 4 (2004), 450. But cf. the more carefully nuanced expressions of Kate Zebiri, "Polemic and Polemical Language," 120–123; and Camilla Adang, "Torah," Vol. 5 (2006), 304.

structures external to the text of scripture—in particular narrative structures.

The story which these commentators recount is a story of Jewish resistance to Muslim claims for the prophet of Islam. The exegetical challenge they face is how to interpret the Qurʾān's 'tampering verses' in such a way as to best reinforce the tale of obstinacy they are telling.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DOCTRINE OF CORRUPTION AS A POLEMICAL THEME

Scholarly study of the doctrine of *taḥrīf* has investigated the accusation as a flashpoint of polemic. Some scholars have included the tampering motif in broader surveys of polemical themes. Other have focused on the theme itself. Most have agreed with Ignaz Goldziher that the accusation of scriptural falsification is the central theme—or at least one of the major themes—of Muslim external polemic. The major scholarly books and articles on *taḥrīf* highlight a diversity of authors, genres and eras of Muslim scholarship. Taken together, they constitute a kind of history of Muslim thought on Judaism and Christianity.

The work of Moritz Steinschneider was pivotal for the scholarly exploration of the theme of *taḥrīf*. He drew attention to a number of works which discuss the Muslim accusation in his *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*. Steinschneider provided bibliographical information on such works as those ascribed to Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064),[1] al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111),[2] and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).[3] Of particular importance for the study of the corruption charge was his highlighting of Ibn Ḥazm's *Iẓhār tabdīl al-Yahūd wa ʾl-Naṣārā liʾl-Tawrāt wa ʾl-Injīl wa bayān tanāquḍ mā bi-aydīhim min dhālika mimmā lā yaḥtamilu ʾl-taʾwīl*.[4] Steinschneider also included a section on Jewish literary responses to the Muslim accusations of the Bible's falsification and abrogation.[5]

[1] *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī ʾl-milal wa ʾl-ahwāʾ wa ʾl-niḥal. Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 99–101.

[2] *al-Radd al-jamīl ʿalā man ghayyara al-Tawrāt wa ʾl-Injīl. Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 48–49.

[3] *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* ('Sound reply to those who altered Christ's religion'). *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 32–34, 36.

[4] "Exposure of the alterations introduced into the Torah and the Gospel by Jews and Christians, and elucidation of the contradictions [contained in the versions they possess] thereof, which cannot be explained away through [metaphorical] interpretation." *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 22–23, 140.

[5] *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 320–325.

The publication of Steinschneider's study provided an occasion for Goldziher to explore the themes treated in Muslim polemical literature in his article, "Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb."[6] Among other prominent themes, Goldziher stressed the significance of the Muslim accusation that the possessors of earlier scriptures had changed and falsified the books of revelation in their possession. He described the accusation of falsification as "the principle polemic moment,"[7] and "the primary charge, which Islam raised against the Ahl al-kitāb from the beginning."[8] With evident wonder, Goldziher traced the attempts to reconstruct the 'original' contents of the Torah, Psalms and Gospel by Muslims who were not familiar with the scriptures themselves.[9] He then pinpointed the importance of Ibn Ḥazm's work *Iẓhār tabdīl al-Yahūd* for the Islamic doctrine of corruption.[10] He also noted the diverse views of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Ṣinhājī [al-Qarāfī] (d. 684/1285),[11] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyā (d. 751/1350),[12] Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442),[13] and Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657)[14] on the question of tampering. While some Muslim polemicists attacked the authenticity of earlier scriptures, wrote Goldziher, other writers—and indeed sometimes the same writers—found abundant prophecies of the coming of Muḥammad in the copies of the scriptures which were available to them.[15] Goldziher brought the history of the doctrine of *taḥrīf* right up to the second half of the 19th century by describing the then just-published Turkish translation of the *Iẓhār al-ḥaqq* by Raḥmat Allāh al-Hindī (1818–91).[16]

Ten years after Goldziher's article, Martin Schreiner was still referring extensively to Steinschneider's survey, calling it "an eloquent witness to the close contact between Muslims and Jews."[17] In the polemic

[6] *ZDMG* 32 (1878), 341–387.
[7] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 344.
[8] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 364.
[9] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 348–360.
[10] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 363–368.
[11] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 369–372.
[12] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 372–5.
[13] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 368.
[14] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 368–9.
[15] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 372–379.
[16] "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 343–344.
[17] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern," *ZDMG* 42 (1888), 591.

between those two groups, Schreiner found the prominent points to be the question of the falsification of the Hebrew Bible, the 'prophecies of Muḥammad' in the earlier scriptures, and the abrogation of the Jewish law.[18] Schreiner discussed the attitude toward the Bible as portrayed in a number of famous *ḥadīth*.[19] He described the views of the Muslim scholars al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/965) and al-Bīrūnī (d. 442/1048),[20] of al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazālī,[21] and of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209).[22] He included a substantial section on Ibn Ḥazm, but left the description of Ibn Ḥazm's position on *taḥrīf* to Goldziher.[23] From the Jewish side of the controversy, Schreiner presented the polemic of Saʿadiyā (882–943),[24] the Karaïtes,[25] Jehuda Halēwī (1075–1141),[26] and Abraham ibn Dāwūd (c. 1246–1316).[27] Schreiner felt that by the time of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Muslim writers had begun to reckon with "the objection of the Jews, who referred to the uninterrupted transmission of the [Biblical] text."[28]

Hartwig Hirschfeld's shorter 1901 article, "Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible," focused mainly on the accusations of Ibn Ḥazm in his *Book of Religions and Denominations*.[29] Hirschfeld also provided translations of passages from Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869)[30] and al-Shahrastānī.[31] He speculated on the influence of Islam on the Karaïtes, and the influence of the Karaïtes on the Ẓāhirites.[32] Finally, Hirschfeld noted the "protest" of Maimonides (1135–1204) to the Muslim accusation of Jewish falsification of the Torah.[33]

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[18] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 592.
[19] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 592–593.
[20] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 596–601.
[21] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 618–621.
[22] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 639–648.
[23] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 612–618.
[24] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 601–607.
[25] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 607–612.
[26] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 621–625.
[27] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 629–639.
[28] "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 641.
[29] *Jewish Quarterly Review* 13 (1901), 225–230, 232–234.
[30] "Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible," 230–232.
[31] "Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible," 222. From his "Refutation of Christianity."
[32] "Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible," 223–225.
[33] "Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible," 234–235. Hirschfeld also discussed a number of the Qurʾānic 'tampering verses,' along with traditions linked to them in *sīra* and *ḥadīth*, in the context of his discussion of the "Medinan Revelations" in *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 103–109.

Scholarly study of the theme of *taḥrīf* took a large step forward through the publication of the first major article devoted exclusively to this subject in 1922. Ignazio Di Matteo explored the theme of *taḥrīf* through the works of major commentators on the Qurʾān as well as through the works of Muslim polemicists.[34] He suggested a historical development in the doctrine, in which the Qurʾān and the early traditionists spoke of the authenticity of the Biblical text, while polemicists coming much later were divided. The commentaries which he examined were those of Ṭabarī[35] and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.[36] Di Matteo found some Muslim polemicists to agree with what he considered the 'older' view, but shows how other polemicists explained *taḥrīf* as the corruption of the text of scripture. He began his survey of Muslim polemicists with al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860) and his "Refutation of the Christians."[37] Other substantial descriptions of significant figures include those of al-Bīrūnī and his *Kitāb al-āthār al-bāqiya*,[38] ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān (d. 823/1420) and his *Tuḥfat al-arīb fī ʾl-radd ʿalā ahl al-ṣalīb*,[39] and Abū-l-Faḍl al-Malikī al-Suʿūdī (d. 942/1535) and his *Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Injīl*.[40] Di Matteo also took note of the influence of al-Ḥindī and provided a handy summary of his attack on the Bible in *Izḥār al-ḥaqq*.[41] In the following year, Di Matteo published a separate article in order to detail the accusations of Ibn Ḥazm.[42]

The article on "Taḥrīf" in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was written by Frants Buhl.[43] Buhl used the largest part of the article to discuss verses from the Qurʾān which have traditionally been associated with the tampering theme. He freely characterized these as accusations made by Muḥammad himself, and attempted to provide

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[34] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani," *Bessarione* xxxviii (1922): 64–111, 223–60. English abstract: M.H. Ananikian, trans., "Tahrif or the alteration of the Bible according to the Moslems," *The Muslim World* 14 (1924): 61–84.

[35] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 88–97.

[36] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 91–96.

[37] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 223–226. Di Matteo described this work in more detail in his "Confutazione contro i Cristiani delo Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1921–2), 301–64.

[38] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 228–234.

[39] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 243–6.

[40] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 247–252.

[41] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 252–8.

[42] "Le pretese contraddizioni della S. Scrittura secondo Ibn Ḥazm," *Bessarione* 39 (1923), 77–127.

[43] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma *et al.*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. 4, 618–619.

a historical frameword for "the vague way in which Muḥammad in the Ḳurʾān speaks of falsifications of scriptures by the 'possessors of a scripture.'"[44] Buhl wrote that this could best be done with the understanding that Muḥammad had at first appealed to the evidence of the earlier scriptures, but that when the Jews ridiculed his claims, he began to accuse them of corrupting their scriptures.[45] Buhl also indicated the extent of the diversity of views on *taḥrīf* among Muslim scholars, from the accusation of textual falsification to the theory of erroneous interpretation.

While Schreiner had focused on the controversial material between Muslims and Jews, Erdmann Fritsch examined the history of Muslim polemic against Christians.[46] He devoted a portion of his study to "Der Vorwurf der Bibelfälschung."[47] He gave special attention to the 'reproach' made by the later Muslim writers [al-Ṣinhājī] al-Qarāfī,[48] and Ibn Taymiyya, whom he portrayed as following in the footsteps of Ibn Ḥazm. Fritsch first noted that for the Muslim polemicists ʿAlī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 240/855) and al-Jāḥiẓ the corruption was to be found not in the original text of the earlier scriptures, but rather came from translators and copyists.[49] He suggested that these were good examples of the careful way in which Muslim scholars treated the question of the falsification of the Bible prior to Ibn Ḥazm.[50] But with Ibn Ḥazm and his followers—the "advocates of the radical theory of falsification," Fritsch called them—the accusation came to include such sophisticated assertions as the story of Ezra's recollection of the Torah after it was lost,[51] rumored discrepancies among Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch,[52] and the impossibility of the sinful acts of prophets.[53] A special feature of Fritsch's article, in

[44] "Taḥrīf," 619.
[45] "Taḥrīf," 618.
[46] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau: Verlag Müller & Seiffert, 1930).
[47] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 54–74.
[48] in his *al-Ajwiba ʾl-fākhira ʿan al-aswila ʾl-fājira*.
[49] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57–8.
[50] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57. Fritsch adds later in his book that prior to Ibn Ḥazm, Muslim polemicists took an "unprejudiced" approach to the text of the New Testament. (p. 64)
[51] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 59–60.
[52] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 60–61.
[53] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 62–3.

comparison to other articles to this point, is his extensive description of polemic against the New Testament—including critical discussion of its canonization,[54] denial of its reports of the crucifixion of Jesus,[55] and a wide variety of accusations of contradiction.[56]

A treatment of *taḥrīf* which helpfully laid out many materials for scholarly study was published by two French authors in 1980.[57] Jean-Marie Gaudeul and Robert Caspar gathered key texts on the theme and presented them in the Arabic original along with a French translation. The article shows the complexity of the theme within the text of the Qur'ān by indicating both the wide range of vocabulary related to tampering, and the positive references to the earlier scriptures.[58] Definitions of the term *taḥrīf* are drawn from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Qaffāl (d. 365/976), and the modernist Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905).[59] The article illustrates the accusation of falsification of the text of the earlier scriptures with passages from Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī.[60] It then presents excerpts from authors who refused to accuse the pre-Qur'ānic scriptures of corruption but who rather found false interpretation of an intact text: Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Ibn Khaldūn, and Muḥammad ʿAbduh.[61] Caspar closes the article with a discussion of views of *taḥrīf* by such authors as Ibn Khaldūn and especially Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) which show not only a knowledge of traditional Muslim positions but also some understanding for Christian and Jewish concepts of revelation.[62] An additional strength of this article is the authors' careful composition of questions to ask of the material.

Camilla Adang also takes a multi-genre approach to the accusation of *taḥrīf* in her *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm*.[63] Bracketed by the views of these two polemicists, her survey of Muslim writers also includes Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 292/905), Ṭabarī, al-Masʿūdī, al-Maqdisī (d. 355/966), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and al-Bīrūnī. She thus draws

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[54] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 64–5.
[55] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 66–70.
[56] *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 70–74.
[57] Jean-Marie Gaudeul and Robert Caspar, "Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant le taḥrîf (falsification) des écritures," *Islamochristiana* vi (1980), 61–104.
[58] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 62–65.
[59] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 65–78.
[60] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 78–89.
[61] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 89–96.
[62] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 96–104.
[63] Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

information from the disparate genres of historical and chronological writing, polemic and apologetic literature, *kalām* and *tafsīr*. Adang divides her subject matter up into the views of the writers on such topics as proofs of prophethood and abrogation. In her chapter on "The question of the authenticity of the Jewish scriptures," she documents a variety of approaches to the meaning of *taḥrīf*.[64] As may be expected, her description of Ibn Ḥazm's arguments are particularly thorough.[65]

In the article on "Taḥrīf" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition,[66] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh attempted to summarize the foregoing 120 years of scholarly descriptions of the doctrine. She enumerated the Qurʾānic verses which have been associated with an accusation of *taḥrīf*, and considered some exegetical treatments of the verses. She indicated that a number of Muslim writers understood *taḥrīf* to mean "distortion of the meaning of the text," but suggested that a more common understanding among Muslim authors was "falsification of the text itself." Christians and Jews defended their scriptures from Muslim accusations of falsification, wrote Lazarus-Yafeh, from an early period. Ibn Ḥazm produced systematic arguments against the authenticity of the Biblical text in the fifth Islamic century in his *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī ʾl-milal*. Lazarus-Yafeh notes that the accusation of scriptural forgery was a polemical motif both in pre-Islamic times among Samaritan and Christian authors, as well as concerning the text of the Qurʾān between Sunnī and Shīʿī authors.[67]

Tampering with Meaning, Tampering with Text

The foregoing descriptions of scholarly articles clearly show that Muslim scholars have made the accusation of tampering with earlier scriptures a major part of their polemic against Jews and Christians.[68] The survey also shows that Muslim writers over the centuries have not been

64 *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 223–248.
65 *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 237–248.
66 P.J. Bearman *et al*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), Vol. 10, 111–112.
67 In *Intertwined Worlds*, Lazarus-Yafeh set a chapter on "Muslim arguments against the Bible" in the context of a variety of Muslim approaches to the earlier scriptures, including study of the Bible in search of the prediction of Muḥammad and Islam.
68 Georges Anawati, at the end of yet another fine scholarly survey of Muslim polemic, remarked on the striking consistency of Muslim objections to Christianity. The tone of the polemic could vary, he wrote, but never its basic line-up of accusations. He placed the Islamic charge of corruption at the head of the list. "Polémique,

unanimous on what they have understood by the charge of tampering. To distinguish the most common views in works from the Muslim tradition, scholars have employed the terms *taḥrīf al-maʿnā*, distortion of the meaning or interpretation of the words of scripture, and *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*, falsification of the text itself.[69] Many Muslim writers throughout the history of Islamic scholarship have favored the former conception. Other writers have championed the latter view, some of them to great effect.[70]

As representative of the view of *taḥrīf al-maʿnā*, a number of scholars have highlighted the approach of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm. Though a work of polemic, and written relatively early (9th C.), his "Refutation of the Christians" envisioned corruption to the interpretation of the Bible, but not to the text itself.[71] Ibn Qutayba also viewed the Torah as a revealed scripture and an historical source.[72] The historian Ibn Khaldūn, in a famous statement near the beginning of his *Muqaddimah*, wrote that "thorough scholars" cannot accept the statement that Jews had altered the Torah, "since custom prevents people who have a (revealed) religion from dealing with their divine scriptures in such a manner."[73] If tampering had taken place in relation to the text

apologie et dialogue islamo-chrétiens: Positions classiques médiévales et positions contemporaines," *Euntes Docete* XXII (1969), 448.

[69] Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," 112. Gaudeul and Caspar, "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 61.

[70] Scholars can differ widely in their characterization of the relative strength of these two approaches in the Muslim tradition. While Lazarus-Yafeh describes the accusation of the falsification of the text as "the more common understanding" ("Taḥrīf," 111), Jane McAuliffe finds that "the assertion of whole-sale textual corruption remains an uncommon stance." "The Qurʾānic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 153.

[71] Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," 112. Buhl, "Taḥrīf," 619. Di Matteo, "Confutazione contro i Christiani," 319. *Idem*., "Il taḥrīf od alterazione," 225. But cf. David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 32–37, 38 n. 28.

[72] Camilla Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures," in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A historical survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146.

[73] *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Vol. 1, 20. Both Lazarus-Yafeh and McAuliffe note the curious fact that this statement is omitted from most printed Arabic editions of *The Muqaddimah*. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," 112. McAuliffe, "The Qurʾānic Context," 156, n. 33. Ibn Khaldūn's statement did not mean, however, that he was encouraging Muslims to read the Torah. Later in his work he wrote, "The religious law has forbidden the study of all revealed scriptures except the Qur'ān." *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 2, 438.

of the Torah, it is confined to its interpretation.[74] Another relatively late medieval writer who favored "alteration of the sense" over corruption of text was Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 884/1480) in his *al-Aqwāl al-qawīma fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīma*.[75] Muslim writers who took the approach of *taḥrīf al-maʿnā*, including Ibn Qutayba and al-Biqāʿī, were more likely to search the Jewish and Christian scriptures for passages which could be read as prophecies of the mission of Muḥammad.

For the view of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*, many scholars have identified the 11th-century Spanish polemicist Ibn Ḥazm as the first to systematize the doctrine of textual falsification and to offer actual citations from the Bible in support of his accusation.[76] Lazarus-Yafeh explains handily in her *Intertwined Worlds* that Ibn Ḥazm presented many examples of what he considered to be chronological and geographical inaccuracies, theological impossibilities, and preposterous behavior of prophets in the Hebrew Bible.[77] Ibn Ḥazm then did the same with the Christian Gospel.[78] For many Muslims, his arguments have been convincing. "Ibn Ḥazm's impact on later Muslim polemics was great, and the themes which he raised with regard to *taḥrīf* and other polemical ideas…became the standard themes of later Muslim polemical literature against both Jews and Christians."[79]

One Muslim scholar who wrote in support of the corruption of the text of the Torah prior to Ibn Ḥazm was al-Maqdisī.[80] Many subsequent

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[74] See Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 368; and Gaudeul and Caspar, "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 91–92. Ibn Khaldūn's perspective was informed by a more realistic idea of how the New Testament Gospels came together, and a greater appreciation for differences in concepts of revelation. *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, 476–77, 192.

[75] Di Matteo, "Il taḥrīf od alterazione," 247. Steinschneider describes the work in *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 389–393.

[76] Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 363. Schreiner, "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 613. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57. Accad, "The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse," 72–73.

[77] *Intertwined Worlds*, 26–35.

[78] Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse* is a full-length description and analysis of Ibn Ḥazm's influential attack.

[79] Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," 112. Cf. Zebiri, "Polemic and Polemical Language," 123.

[80] Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 149–151. Adang characterizes al-Maqdisī's attitude toward the Torah as "ambivalent," because he also searched for annunciations of Muḥammad in the Torah (149). In contrast to Ibn Ḥazm, al-Maqdisī wrote in a courteous tone and was generally fair and accurate in his descriptions of the beliefs

Muslim writers echoed Ibn Ḥazm's arguments, such as al-Qarāfī, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyā.[81] Thus the two tampering accusations appeared to continue on their parallel tracks for more than half a millennium.[82] Then in the mid-19th century, the Muslim accusation of *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* took a kind of quantum leap through the controversy between Indian Muslim scholars and European Christian missionaries in the India of the British Raj.

Mawlana Raḥmat Allāh Kayrānawī ("al-Hindī," 1818–91) is credited with moving the textual corruption accusation forward through a famous public debate and through a widely-published book. Interestingly, the most influential Indian theologian of the modern period, Shāh Walī Allāh (1703–62), had previously declared that he did not believe in the corruption of the text of the Torah. He had explained in his *Al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* that 'tampering with meaning' means corrupt interpretation (*taʾwīl*), misconstruing a verse arbitrarily, and deviation (*inḥirāf*) from the straight path.[83] Likewise a contemporary of Raḥmat Allāh, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (1817–98), conceived of tampering as referring essentially to interpretation rather than actual

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and practices of the Jews (151). al-Maqdisī was also candid about his motivation for making a case to Muslims for the alteration of the text of the Torah: "I have explained all this to you, so that you will not be discouraged when they say that Muhammad is not mentioned in the Torah" (from his *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa al-Taʾrīkh*, cited in Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 150).

[81] Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," 112. However, Goldziher quotes from a manuscript of al-Jawziyyā the approach to a popular aspect of the tampering accusation taken by this 14th-century student of Ibn Taymiyya: "It is an entirely false idea when it is asserted that Jews and Christians have agreed together to expunge [the name of Muḥammad] out of their scriptures in all the ends of the world where they live. No one among learned Muslims asserts this, neither has God said anything about this in the Qurʾān, nor has any of the Companions, Imams or Qurʾān scholars expressed himself in this sense." "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 373.

[82] Ibn Taymiyya wrote in the 14th century that the Islamic position towards textual corruption was still diverse and ambiguous: "If…they [Christians] mean that the Qurʾān confirms the textual veracity (*alfāẓ*) of the scriptural books which they now possess—that is, the Torah and the Gospels—this is something which some Muslims will grant them and which many Muslims will dispute. However, most Muslims will grant them most of that." Cited by Martin Accad in "The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse," 73.

[83] Arabic translation by Muḥammad Munīr al-Dimashqī (Deoband: Mukhtār and Company, 1986), 7. Cf. G.N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1967), 9. Shāh Walī Allāh also discussed the theme of *taḥrīf* in Book VI of his *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, English translation in Marcia K. Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument from God* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 346–352.

verbal corruption of the text.[84] But neither of these moderate views had the popular appeal of the case Raḥmat Allāh made for textual corruption in a public debate which took place in Agra in 1854—in the politically-charged atmosphere just prior to the Mutiny.

Raḥmat Allāh seized upon a strategic plan for publicly confounding European Christian missionaries who had been freely preaching and publishing evangelical faith in northern India during the first half of the 19th century. For the first time in the history of Muslim polemic, the Indian theologian used works of historical criticism written in Europe to support his claim that Christians themselves knew of the corruption of the Bible.[85] The substance of Raḥmat Allāh's polemic in the debate, as well as other materials which he had prepared, appeared in print first in 1853 in the Urdu *Iʿjāz-e ʿĪsāwī*, then more significantly in 1864 in the Arabic *Izḥār al-ḥaqq*.[86] Kate Zebiri writes that the Arabic work has had a great influence on Muslim polemicists since the late 19th century: "The *Izḥār* is a seminal work for modern Muslim refutations of Christianity."[87] In support of this observation, much of what M.Y.S. Haddad describes as the material which Arab authors use to accuse the Torah of corruption comes from the *Iẓhār al-ḥaqq*. He writes that 20th-century Arab authors did not add substantially to Raḥmat Allāh's polemic.[88]

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[84] Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 55.

[85] Christine Schirrmacher, "Muslim Apologetics and the Agra Debates of 1854: A Nineteenth-century Turning Point," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 13 (1994), 74–84.

[86] Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1993), 294–297.

[87] *Muslims and Christians*, 47.

[88] *Arab Perspectives on Judaism*, 103–114. An interesting investigation could be made into the role of external provocation in the polemical achievements of Ibn Ḥazm and Raḥmat Allāh—arguably the two most influential Muslim cases for the corruption of the text of the Bible. Emilio García Gómez wrote that Ibn Ḥazm was reacting to a work by the Spanish Jew Ibn al-Naghrīla which had accused the Qurʾān of contradictions. García Gómez wrote that Ibn Ḥazm had not seen the work he was refuting, but rather was working from what he had read in a previous Muslim refutation whose author he does not name. "Polémica religiosa entre Ibn Hazm e Ibn al-Nagrīla," *Al-Andalus* 4 (1936–1939), 1–6. See also Roger Arnaldez, "Controverse d'Ibn Hazm contre Ibn Nagrila le Juif," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 13–14 (1973), 41–48; and David S. Powers, "Reading/misreading one another's Scriptures," 110–111. However, Sarah Stroumsa questions the involvement of Ibn al-Naghrīla in "From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics: Ibn al-Rāwandī's Kitāb al-Dāmigh," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987), 767–772. Raḥmat Allāh's provocation was the Swiss scholar and missionary Karl Pfander and his polemical work,

According to scholars of the Muslim tradition, then, discussions of the tampering theme in Muslim works proceeded mainly along these lines of *taḥrīf al-maʿnā* and *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*. Or, as Jane McAuliffe has described it: "two parallel trajectories can be traced through the centuries-long interplay of polemic and apologetic which launched these works. One line of exegetical analysis has occupied itself principally with scorning the Jewish and Christian scriptures, while the other set about searching them."[89] McAuliffe finds that this "inherent tension" has never been directly addressed in the corpus of classical Islamic thought, nor has that tradition found a way to resolve "this lingering contradiction."[90]

Verses Connected to the Tampering Theme

Scholars of the Muslim tradition have found that Muslim writers on both sides of the tampering question connected their statements about the earlier scriptures with particular verses in the Qurʾān. Which verses have been connected with the theme of tampering, and how have those verses been understood by Muslim exegetes? The following collection of lists of 'tampering verses' compiled by scholars of Muslim polemic will help determine which verses have gained the most significance in Muslim tradition—and in turn which passages should be examined in the *tafsīr* works of the exegetes.

Muslim polemicists have typically based their accusation of scriptural falsification on a series of verses in the Qurʾān.[91] Ignaz Gold-

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Mīzān al-ḥaqq, which had been circulating in northern India in Persian and Urdu translations for more than a decade before the Agra debate. Schirrmacher, "Muslim Apologetics," 76.

[89] "The Qur'ānic Context," 144.

[90] "The Qur'ānic Context," 153. Kate Zebiri documents the same ambivalence in her survey of Muslim popular literature on Christianity. She writes that though all of the authors assert that the text of the Bible is corrupt, all equally appeal to verses from the Bible to support their views—"either on the basis that some authentic passages have survived, or because some verses can be reinterpreted rather than rejected, or simply in order to put forward a hypothetical argument which is based on premises that one's opponents can't reject." *Muslims and Christians*, 50.

[91] Hirschfeld wrote of Ibn Ḥazm: "His object in criticizing the Bible was to substantiate the charges brought by Mohammed against Jews (and Christians) of falsifying their holy Writs. His strict way of interpreting the Qorān led him to take this accusation in its literal sense...." "Mohammedan Criticism," 226. Pulcini adds that in order to warn Muslim readers against developing a sanguine approach to the Bible from Qurʾānic passages which appear favourable to the earlier scriptures, Ibn Ḥazm made

ziher wrote, "The chief passages which later polemicists maintained to have been stated regarding this [accusation] are: Q 2:73 [79]; 3:72 [78]; 4:48 [46]; 5:16 [13], 45 [41], 52 [48]."[92] Other scholars have observed these verses—as well as a wide selection of others—linked with the theme of tampering in the Muslim tradition. Moritz Steinschneider drew attention to polemical use of Q 2:75, 79, 159, 174 and 211; 3:78 and 187; 5:15 and 77.[93] Hartwig Hirschfeld indicated Q 3:78–9, 5:44, and 5:63.[94] In his exploration of the theme, Ignazio Di Matteo investigated the exegetical tradition on Q 5:41–48, 2:75–79, 2:41–42, 5:13–15 and 4:46.[95] Frants Buhl highlighted verses containing the verbs *ḥarrafa* (Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41); *lawā* (Q 3:78, 4:46); and *baddala* (Q 2:59, 7:162); and described Q 2:79 as "a direct charge of having falsified the text."[96] Josef Horovitz wrote that "even in the Ḳurʾān we find the Jews reproached" with Q 4:46, 5:13, 5:41, 3:71 and 6:91.[97] Arthur Jeffery wrote, "the charge of *taḥrīf* is ultimately based on a passage in the Qurʾān (Q 2:70 [75], cf. 4:48 [46], 5:16 [13], 5:45 [41])."[98] W.M. Watt discussed the verses containing *ḥarrafa* (Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41) and *baddala* (Q 2:59, 7:162), mentioned the verses of concealing (Q 2:42, 76, 140, 146, 159, 174; 3:71; 5:15; 6:91), and also

use of Q 2:146, 3:71 and 3:78. *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 174–175. Adang adds Ibn Ḥazm's reference to Q 4:46 (though the phrase Ibn Ḥazm cites is also in Q 5:13 and 5:41). "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 152, 159 n. 104. Ibn Ḥazm further attempted to prove alteration by quoting Q 48:29 ("That is their likeness in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel…") and noting that "we do not find any of this in [the books] that the Jews and the Christians possess and which they claim to be the Torah and the Gospel." In other words, since those earlier scriptures were found not to contain what a Qurʾānic verse said they would contain, Ibn Ḥazm judged them to be falsified. The quotation is from *Al-Fisal fī ʾl-milal*, and is translated in Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 152.

92 "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 344. Goldziher gave the verse numbers based on Flügel's numbering system. The numbers in brackets are the Cairo verse numberings which are found in most Qur'āns today.

93 *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 320–321.

94 "Mohammedan Criticism," 223.

95 "Il 'taḥrīf' od Alterazione," 80–96.

96 "Taḥrīf," 619.

97 "Tawrāt," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma *et al.*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. 4, 707.

98 "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between ʿUmar II and Leo III," *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944): 280. Jeffery has given the Flügel verse numberings. The Cairo numberings are indicated in brackets. Elsewhere Jeffery indicated the same four verses, plus Q 2:79 and 3:78, as "references to the tampering with Scripture." "The Qurʾān as Scripture," *The Muslim World* 40 (1950), 259–260.

indicated Q 2:79 and 3:78.[99] Adel-Théodore Khoury cited Q 2:75–76, 5:13, and 5:41.[100] John Wansbrough highlighted Q 2:59 (like Q 7:162) as "one of many Quranic passages assumed by exegetes to refer to a conscious and malicious distortion of the word of God."[101] Gaudeul and Caspar grouped the relevant verses in six *séries*: *taḥrīf* at Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41; *tabdīl*, Q 2:59 and 7:162; *kitmān*, Q 2:42, 2:140, 2:146, 2:159, 2:174, 3:71, 3:187; *labs*, Q 2:42, 3:71; *layy*, Q 3:78, 4:46; and *nisyān*, Q 5:13, 5:14, 7:53, 7:165.[102] Mahmood Ayoub indicated that Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41 have been interpreted by Muslims to back the accusation of alteration.[103] Mustansir Mir saw the accusation of "distorting the scriptures" as coming from Q 4:46 and 5:41 (*taḥrīf*), Q 3:78 (*layy*), and Q 5:15 (*ikhfāʾ*).[104] John Burton examined exegesis of the four verses containing the verb *ḥarrafa* (Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41), eight verses containing *katama* (Q 2:42, 2:140, 2:146, 2:159, 2:174, 3:71, 3:187, 4:37), and one verse with *baddala* (Q 2:211).[105] Stephen Wasserstrom associated Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41 with the "theory of tahrif."[106] David Thomas cited Q 2:75, 4:46f., 5:13, 5:41, 3:78, and 2:79.[107] Camilla Adang writes: "The *taḥrīf*-verses are S. 2:75–79; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41."[108] Jean-Louis Déclais linked the following verses with the "eventual" doctrine of falsification: Q 2:75–79, 3:77–78, 4:44–46, 5:13, 5:41, 6:91 and 7:161–162.[109] Hawa Lazarus-Yafeh associates the charge of *taḥrīf* with Q 2:75, 4:46 and 5:13; she further links *tabdīl* with Q 2:59 and 7:162, and *lawā* with Q 3:78.[110] Pulcini noted 'changing' in Q 2:59, 2:75, 2:79, 4:46, 5:13; 'twisting' in Q 3:78, 4:46; 'concealing' in Q 2:146,

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[99] "The Early Development," 51–53.

[100] *Polemique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIII^e–XIII^e S.)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 210, 211.

[101] *Quranic Studies*, 189. Elsewhere Wansbrough noted that the *Sīra* links *kitmān* with Q 2:42 and *taḥrīf* with 2:75. *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

[102] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 62–63.

[103] "ʿUzayr in the Qurʾān and Muslim Tradition," 16, n. 13.

[104] *Dictionary of Qurʾānic Terms and Concepts* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).

[105] "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 95–106.

[106] *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 174.

[107] "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," 30.

[108] She also indicates verses which accuse of confounding the truth, concealing, substituting words, and twisting with tongues. *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 223n.

[109] *Les premiers Musulmans face à la tradition biblique*, 99 n. 38.

[110] "Taḥrīf," 111. Elsewhere she draws attention to Q 2:79. *Intertwined Worlds*, 20–21.

2:159, 2:174, 3:71, 5:15, 6:91; and 'forgetting' in Q 5:14.[111] In a recent study of the corruption theme, Abdullah Saeed points to Q 2:59, 2:79, 3:78; and, as "highlighting *taḥrīf*," Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, and 5:41.[112] Martin Accad describes *taḥrīf* as "an ambiguous accusation" in Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41.[113]

Analysis of these 'scholarly lists' shows that the Qurʾānic verses which are most frequently associated with the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption are Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41.[114] These four verses are in fact the verses which contain the Arabic verb *ḥarrafa*, of which *taḥrīf* is the verbal noun. Two other verses which appear very frequently in these lists are Q 3:78 and 2:79.[115] Along with these six verses scholars have indicated some 20 other verses with varying frequency. A striking feature of these lists is that scholars have only cited verses from Sūras 2–7.

The aim of this study is to investigate the understandings of the Qurʾānic verses of tampering among the earliest Muslim commentators. The lists of verses provided by scholars are helpful. However, since those lists have in many cases been drawn from works of Muslim polemic, they are not entirely adequate. Determination of the essential commentary passages must somehow incorporate the vocabulary of scripture itself. "The full Qurʾānic accusation must be culled from a broad range of verses assembled through the keyword search of six basic terms and their cognates, terms which carry such connotations as changing, substituting, concealing, confounding, twisting (the tongue) and forgetting (*taḥrīf, tabdīl, kitmān, labs, layy* and *nisyān*)."[116] Here Jane McAuliffe is referencing, and basically relaying, the verbs of tampering Gaudeul and Caspar set out in their "Textes de la tradition musulmane."[117] This semantic field of tampering will be explored in chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 will describe and analyze how the exegetes

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[111] *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 14–15.
[112] "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World* 92 (2002), 420–421.
[113] "The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse," 72. Cf. *idem.*, "Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible," 68–69.
[114] Some 18 times each.
[115] Some 13 and 12 times, respectively.
[116] "The Qurʾānic Context," 144.
[117] "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 62–63.

explained the 'broad range of verses' at the intersection of the scholarly lists and the semantic field.

Exegesis During the Formative Period of Islam

During the past 40 years, scholarly access to the commentaries from the formative period of Qurʾānic exegesis has greatly improved. Some of the early *tafsīr* works have only recently become available in printed editions. When John Wansbrough examined the commentaries of the formative period in the mid-1970s, most of the texts were in manuscript form. But since the publication of his *Quranic Studies* in 1977, all of the significant early texts have been published.[118] A number of published commentaries on the Qurʾān bear traditional attribution to Muslim scholars of the second and third Islamic centuries. The precise dating of early *tafsīr* works continues to be a difficult process up to the present day. But the exegetical work ascribed to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, a primary source in this study, appears to be authentic.[119]

Muqātil's *Tafsīr* was edited between 1979 and 1987 by ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta and published in four volumes in Cairo.[120] The

[118] Andrew Rippin, "*Quranic Studies*, part IV: Some methodological notes," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997), 40. In his foreword to a reprinting of *Quranic Studies*, Rippin lists and describes some 17 manuscript works used by Wansbrough, almost all of which have now been edited and published. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), xii–xiii, xxxix–xli. Fred Leemhuis dates this process of publication to the decade following 1992. "Discussion and Debate in Early Commentaries of the Qurʾān," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 322.

[119] Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr," *EI2* (1998), Vol. 10, 86: "We are on somewhat firmer ground for discussion of the formative period of Tafsīr with a series of books the character of which is more cohesive and thus more likely to be authentic, although certainly not free of later interpolation, reformulation and editorial intrusion." Rippin includes a work ascribed to al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830) alongside works attributed to Muqātil, al-Farrāʾ and ʿAbd al-Razzāq. Claude Gilliot writes in a similar vein, "Avec le Commentaire de Muqātil b. Sulaymān (m. 150/765) nous sommes déjà en terrain plus sûr, même si le texte édité pose plus d'une question." "Les débuts de l'exégèse coranique," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 58 (1990), 90. This is also the thesis of the more recent study of Mehmet Akif Koç, "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil b. Sulaymān (150/767) in the Exegesis of al-Thaʿlabī (427/1036) with Muqātil's Own Exegesis," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 53 (2008), 78.

[120] C.H.M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 130. A first volume of this commentary, also edited by Shiḥāta, appeared in octavo some years before the complete edition. Both Kees Versteegh and Claude Gilliot report encountering difficulties in trying to avail themselves of the

published edition is based on a manuscript associated with the name of Hudhayl ibn Ḥabīb (d. after 190/805) and known as the "Iraqi" or "Baghdādī" recension of the commentary. In the introduction to his 11th-century Qurʾān commentary *al-Kashf wa ʾl-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) mentioned three recensions of Muqātil's *Tafsīr* that were (presumably) available to him. One recension mentioned by al-Thaʿlabī shares a key link in the chain of transmission with the published version (ʿAbd Allāh ibn Thābit, d. 308/920), and is thus thought to be the same as the "Baghdādī" recension. The second and third recensions mentioned by al-Thaʿlabī are referred to as "Irani" or "Khurāsānī" because links in the chains of transmission are associated with eastern centres such as Merv and Herat.[121] The chain of transmission of the second recension, through Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī (not the exegete), is difficult to trace. The third recension al-Thaʿlabī mentioned, however, is associated with the name of Abū ʿIṣma Nūḥ ibn Abī Maryam (d. 173/789), the stepson of Muqātil. While only the "Baghdādī" recension is known to exist today, scholars have speculated on the differences between this published version and the other recensions to which al-Thaʿlabī referred.[122] For example, it has been suggested that part of the "Khurāsānī" version of Muqātil's commentary is contained in the commentary of al-Thaʿlabī.[123]

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full commentary. Kees Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis: The Origins of Kufan Grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil*," *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 206, n. 1. Claude Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit," *Journal Asiatique* 279 (1991), 39, n. 1. Gilliot supposed that the publication was delayed "par la censure des autorités d'al-Azhar." "Muqātil, grand exégète," 39, n. 1. Cf. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 130.

[121] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens in frühen Islam* (Berlin, 1991), Vol. 2, 519–23. Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 45–48. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 131.

[122] Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, 520, 522–3. Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 45–48. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 131. Ess wrote in 1991 amid his speculations, "Solange wir die östliche Rezension nicht vergleichen können, dürfte es schwer sein, auf den ursprünglichen Kern durchzustoßen." *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, 522. One of the hindrances, Ess wrote, was the lack of availability of al-Thaʿlabī's commentary (p. 520). Since that time, however, *al-Kashf* has been published (ed. Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan, Beirut 2004), and authors have made use of the complete manuscript of the commentary in the Beyazit Library, as well as other valuable manuscripts, in their scholarly investigations. Koç, "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil," 69, n. 1. Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qurʾān commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 6–8, 231–242.

[123] Koç, "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil," 78. Cf. Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, 520.

Further, Mehmet Akif Koç has carefully examined some 630 references to Muqātil in al-Thaʿlabī's commentary and has concluded that though there are differences between the "Baghdādī" recension and the references in al-Thaʿlabī's commentary, they show no signs of a systematic ideological effort to revise Muqātil's commentary either way.[124]

Scholars have also speculated about what sorts of materials may possibly have been added to the "Baghdādī" recension by transmitters of the manuscript after the death of Muqātil. Several scholars have suggested for the "Baghdadi" manuscript a date of 200/815 or later.[125] For the purposes of this study, scholarly suggestions regarding the nature of these possibly-added materials are worth noting. Suggestions of what might have been added include masoretic interpretation and close philological treatment,[126] variant readings,[127] lexical explanations and legal opinions,[128] and grammatical exegesis.[129] On the other hand, scholars of Muqātil appear to be virtually unanimous that the narrative exegesis contained in the earliest manuscripts of the commentary belongs to Muqātil himself.[130] Since narrative exegesis makes up a

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[124] Koç, "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil," 93. Koç discusses the speculations of Ess in particular on pp. 78 & 93. A number of the points of similarity are significant for this study. Koç indicates that al-Thaʿlabī transmits some 111 "occasions of revelation" from Muqātil, a number which Koç highlights as "substantial." "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil," 75 & 77.

[125] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 144. Gilliot, "Les débuts de l'exégèse coranique," 91. Norman Calder, "The Ummī in Early Islamic Juridic Literature," *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 113, n. 6. More recently, however, Nicolai Sinai was content to date the manuscript to 760 A.D. *Fortschreibung und Auslegung. Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 171.

[126] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 143.

[127] Andrew Rippin, "Studying Early Tafsīr Texts," *Der Islam* 72 (1995), 316.

[128] Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, 521–2.

[129] Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 49.

[130] Goldziher, *Richtungen*, 58–60. Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 61–7. Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 14, 238. Fred Leemhuis, "Origins and Early Development of the *tafsīr* Tradition," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29. *Idem.*, "The Koran and its Exegesis: From memorising to learning," in *Centres of Learning: Learning and location in pre-modern Europe and the Near East*, Jan Willem Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 97. Gilliot, "Les débuts de l'exégèse coranique," 90. *Idem.*, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval," *EQ* (2002), Vol. 2, 107. Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, 518–19. Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 210. *Idem.*, *Arabic Grammar*, 130. Regula Forster, "Methoden arabischer Qur'ānexegese: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, aṭ-Ṭabarī und

large part of the Muqātil material examined in chapter 4, and is central to the argument presented in chapters 6 and 7, this striking scholarly consensus on the authenticity of the narrative exegesis encourages a confident examination of these materials.

According to traditional Muslim sources, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān was born in Balkh, lived in Marw, Baghdād and Baṣra, and died in 150/767. He is said to have taught in Makka, Damascus and Beirut as well.[131] Muqātil's commentary has been described by scholars as one of the earliest Muslim exegetical works in existence.[132] The style of exegesis it typifies belongs to the most primitive form of commentary on the Qurʾān, suggests Kees Versteegh.[133] Yeshayahu Goldfeld praised the *Tafsīr* as "probably the best organized and most consistent Islamic commentary."[134] However, Muqātil and his commentary seem to have lost favour among orthodox Muslim scholarship for a time, based on the evidence that he is seldom cited for about a century and a half.[135] A number of accusations were made against Muqātil by Muslim scholars, among them writing about God in anthropomorphic language; using too much material from the 'People of the Book'; immodestly trying to specify what is vague and anonymous in scripture; and especially giving exegetical traditions without a proper *isnād*.[136] These Muslim

ʿAbdarrazzāq al-Qāshānī zu Q 53,1–18," in *Sinnvermittlung: Studien zur Geschichte von Exegese und Hermeneutik*, I.P. Michel and H. Weder, eds. (Zurich: Pano, 2000), 388. *Idem.*, *Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qurʾānexegese am Beispiel von Q 53,1–18* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001), 11. Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002), 98. Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 168–9.

[131] M. Plessner-[A. Rippin], "Muḳātil ibn Sulaymān," *EI2* (1993), Vol. 7, 508.

[132] Yeshayahu Goldfeld, "Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān," *Bar-Ilan Arabic and Islamic Studies* 2 (1978), xiv. Regula Forster calls the commentary "the oldest complete edited Qur'ān commentary in good condition." *Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qur'ānexegese am Beispiel von Q 53, 1–18* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001), 11.

[133] "Grammar and Exegesis," 210.

[134] "The Development of Theory on Qur'ānic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship," *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988), 23.

[135] Fred Leemhuis describes Muqātil's *Tafsīr* as "an interesting source for an early popular Islam which, perhaps, at the time of its composition was not yet divorced from orthodoxy." "Discussion and Debate," 232. Koç documents how Muslim scholars of the tenth century and later cited Muqātil freely, beginning with al-Māturīdī (333/945) and including—notably—al-Thaʿlabī. "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil," 70–74.

[136] Claude Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 50–68. Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 136; Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 214; Plessner-[Rippin], "Muḳātil ibn Sulaymān," 508; Goldfeld, "Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān," xxviii–xxix; H. Birkeland, "Old

accusations influenced some early western scholarly descriptions of Muqātil;[137] and Goldfeld wrote that partly due to this, "Orientalism has not yet paid this work the attention it deserves."[138] Muqātil is also sometimes labeled a Murjiʾite or a Zaydite, though it is hard to detect any such tendencies in his writings.[139] The edition of the *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* used in this study is the Shiḥāta edition printed in Beirut in 2002.[140]

The second major commentary of this study is the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* of Abū Jaʿfar ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Ṭabarī was born in 839 at Amul in Ṭabaristan, lived in Baghdād, and died 310/923. He was a prolific writer and provided the standard history of the first centuries in Islam, in addition to many other works. Goldziher considered Ṭabarī to be "one of the greatest characters of Islamic scholarship of all time."[141] "The great virtues of his History and Commentary are that they form the most extensive of extant early works of Islamic scholarship and that they preserve for us the greatest array of citations from lost sources."[142] Ṭabarī's huge collection of exegetical traditions became a standard work upon which later commentators frequently drew. To the present day it is "a mine of information for historical and critical research by western scholars."[143] One of the famous Muslim tributes to Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* came from the jurist Abū Ḥamīd

Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran," *Avhanlinger utgitt av Det Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo*, II, *Hist.-Filos Klasse*, 1955, No. I, 26–27. Yeshayahu Goldfeld characterizes the strong criticism of Muqātil's commentary as "nurtured by envy and inferiority." "The Development of Theory," 23. Interestingly, however, most of the Muslim jurist-theologians and traditionists who criticized Muqātil for his poor transmission of traditions also qualify him as a "great qur'ānic commentator"! Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," 106.

137 Notably Goldziher, *Richtungen*, 57–60. Cf. Goldfeld, "Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān," xiv-xv.

138 "The Development of Theory," 23.

139 Plessner-[Rippin], "Muḳātil ibn Sulaymān," 508. Cf. Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 79–81.

140 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta, ed. (Beirut: Mūʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabiyya, 2002), 5 volumes.

141 *Richtungen*, 86. Cf. Andrew Rippin, "Al-Ṭabarī," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 13, 322: "since his lifetime [Ṭabarī] has been seen as the most important intellect of his age."

142 C.E. Bosworth, "Al-Ṭabarī." *EI2* (2000), Vol. 10, 13.

143 R. Paret, "al-Ṭabarī, Abū Djaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Djarīr," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma *et al.*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. 4, 578.

al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1015): "If a person has to go to China to obtain a copy of this work, it will not have been too much [effort]."[144]

Until relatively recently among western scholars, Ṭabarī's famous commentary was considered lost. When Nöldeke wrote the first edition of his *Geschichte des Qorans* in 1860, he could only conjecture and wish: "If we had this work we could do without all later commentaries. Unfortunately it seems to be completely lost. It was, like the great historical work of the author, an inexhaustible source out of which later writers drew their wisdom."[145] Goldziher later wrote, "It was therefore a pleasant surprise for the scholarly world in east and west when, because of a complete manuscript kept in the book collection of the Emir of Hāʾil, a full edition of the enormous work was presented in 30 volumes in Cairo in 1903."[146] In all, only a few manuscript copies of the commentary have survived to the present time. The edition of the commentary referred to in this study is the one edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir.[147]

For the purposes of this study, Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* is an appropriate endpoint because it marks both the beginning of classical Qurʾānic commentary and the close of the formative period of Qurʾānic exegesis.[148] "Ṭabarī's Commentary is an example in its own sphere of the dividing line between two ages: an 'introductory' period of oral narrative, and the period of written records, which initiated the closing in of the exegetical *sunna* upon itself."[149] Abdelmajid Charfi suggested that with the *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* Islamic thought 'settled' after a period in which great freedom of Qur'ānic interpretation had been permitted.[150] Another good reason to end the present study with this work is that, as Rippin notes, Ṭabarī's commentary gathers together in a single

[144] Cited by Goldziher in *Richtungen*, 86. Tributes to the commentary continue up to recent times, for example in "Reflections on the Tradition of Qurʾanic Exegesis," 303. There Daud Rahbar writes that Ṭabarī's commentary is the "mother of all commentaries on the Qurʾān and a thorough analysis of it is due."

[145] Cited in Goldziher, *Richtungen*, 86–87.

[146] *Richtungen*, 87. Otto Loth noted that the manuscript was discovered in Cairo around 1871. "Ṭabarî's Korancommentar," *ZDMG* 35 (1881), 591. Cf. Heribert Horst, "Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs," *ZDMG* 103 (1953), 290.

[147] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, eds. (Cairo, 1955–69), 16 volumes (incomplete).

[148] McAuliffe, *Qurʾanic Christians*, 13.

[149] Abdelmajid Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980), 145.

[150] "Christianity in the Qurʾan Commentary of Ṭabarī," 145.

volume the major exegetical methodologies employed up until that point in time, including the methodologies of Muqātil, al-Farrāʾ and ʿAbd al-Razzāq.[151]

The development of the tampering theme in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī begins with their explanations of verses which contain the verbs *ḥarrafa* and *baddala*, from which the technical terms *taḥrīf* and *tabdīl* come. From there the scriptural words of tampering move out in successive concentric circles into a large semantic field. In that field verbs and other expressions of tampering jostle with descriptions of the earlier scriptures which appear to be uniformly positive. In the following chapter the Qurʾānic material on the earlier scriptures, as well as the semantic field of tampering, will be explored.

[151] "Tafsīr," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 240. Cf. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval," 111.

CHAPTER THREE

QURʾĀNIC REFERENCES TO THE EARLIER SCRIPTURES

Muslim commentary on the Qurʾān (*tafsīr*) is a literary genre which displays certain specific identifiable characteristics. The most straightforward of these characteristics is the inclusion of the entire canonical text of the Qurʾān within the *tafsīr*. A *tafsīr* presents the text of scripture, divided into segments and interspersed with the comments of the exegete. Norman Calder suggested that any work which does not have this character cannot be said to belong to the "central tradition of *tafsīr*."[1]

The *tafsīr* genre provides the exegete with certain reassuring parameters. The text of the Qurʾān exerts a "centripetal force"[2] on his work of commentary. He may well have the complete text of scripture, or at least a good part of it, by memory. He works from within this familiar world of the Qurʾān, a world just large enough that information found incompatible with it can be safely excluded.[3] The text of scripture fills his mind with a repertoire of expressions and phrases which he can use in his exegesis. The two exegetes of this study often explain the meaning of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān itself,[4] using a system of cross reference to illuminate points of etymology or grammar.

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[1] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 101.

[2] Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 106.

[3] Abdelmajid Charfi suggests that Ṭabarī followed the Qurʾānic text "without consideration of historical accuracy in its modern sense," and that the Qurʾān was his "only criterion" for judging Christian beliefs and for interpretation of Gospel texts. "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," 145, 146.

[4] Versteegh finds that "Muqātil's main principle is the explanation of the Qurʾān from the Qurʾān." "Grammar and Exegesis," 216. But this is a general principle of Qurʾānic commentary up to the present. According to Ibn Taymiyya: "If someone asks, 'What is the best method of interpretation?' the answer is that the soundest method is that whereby the Qur'an is interpreted through the Qur'an. For what is summarily expressed in one place is expatiated upon in another. What is abridged in one place is elaborated upon in another." Jane Dammen McAuliffe in *Windows on the House of Islam*, John Renard, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 36, translating from Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*. See also Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, A. Rippin, ed. (Oxford: 1988), 56; and Fred Leemhuis, "The Koran and its Exegesis: From memorising to learning," in *Centres of*

The Muslim scholar who commits to providing a continuous explanation of the text of the Qurʾān, however, must also submit to the constraints of the genre. The polemicist or theologian is free to make any assertions he likes, choosing and citing his authorities as it suits his argument. But because a *tafsīr* contains the full text of the Qurʾān, the exegete cannot ignore the scriptural wordings on subjects which he is addressing.[5] To do so would be to risk the charge of inconsistency from an astute reader.

In the case of the tampering motif, the Qurʾān contains a substantial amount of material referring to earlier scriptures, as well as another body of material which appears to refer to various actions of tampering. This material needs to be explored in order to envision the conceptual and terminological environment within which the exegetes were writing. A larger view of the Qurʾānic material on the earlier scriptures will provide a context for the tampering verses which may in turn facilitate the evaluation of nuances in the commentaries.

This chapter offers a description and analysis of the Qurʾānic material on both the earlier scriptures and the vocabulary of tampering. The material on the earlier scriptures will be investigated by word study techniques which are familiar from Biblical Studies. The language of tampering will be analyzed through the concept of the semantic field of tampering. Knowledge of the wider semantic field of tampering will provide valuable perspective on the verses of tampering and their exegesis by Muqātil and Ṭabarī in subsequent chapters. Some of the writing in this chapter will be concerned with fine etymological distinctions and careful counting of word frequencies. But this detailed analysis is necessary in order to set the stage for the discussion of the tampering verses by the exegetes. Late in the chapter, a chart will set out the interaction of both groups of material in a visual fashion.

One striking observation, which may be here forecast, is that the largest concentrations of references to the earlier scriptures come

Learning: Learning and location in pre-modern Europe and the Near East, Jan Willem Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 101.

[5] Charfi notes that Muslim authors writing specifically in refutation of the Christians would choose a position on a theme like *taḥrīf* and simply argue it. By contrast, almost all commentators agreed to apply "the classical Islamic view of revelation (*waḥy wa-tanzīl*)" to the Gospel and the other earlier scriptures. "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," 146–147.

in the very *sūra*s which contain the highest frequency of verbs and expressions of tampering. The full implications of this fact, however, will only become clear at the end of the analysis of the commentary tampering passages in subsequent chapters.

References to Earlier Scriptures in the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān contains a substantial amount of material related to earlier scriptures. Sometimes these scriptures are identified by name; other times they are identified by the prophet to whom they were revealed. In other cases, earlier scriptures are indicated by terms which are less distinct, and these terms were understood in various ways by the exegetes. In many Qurʾānic contexts there appears to be a self-consciousness about the relationship between previous scriptures and the words which are conceived of as being presently "sent down." Explicit references to earlier scriptures seem to be uniformly positive and respectful.

Scriptures Mentioned by Name

Three particular earlier scriptures are mentioned by name in the Qurʾān: the Tawrāt, the Injīl, and the Zabūr.[6] The names Tawrāt and Injīl first appear at the beginning of the third Sūra, together at Q 3:3. The name Zabūr first appears at Q 4:163.

The term Tawrāt appears some 18 times in the Qurʾān.[7] It appears six times in the third Sūra[8] and seven times in the fifth Sūra,[9] but not at all in Sūras one, two, four and six.[10] Beyond the fifth Sūra, the word Tawrāt occurs only five times.[11]

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[6] Jeffery, "The Qurʾān as Scripture," 202.

[7] Cf. Adang, "Torah," 300.

[8] At Q 3:3, 48, 50, 65 and 93 (x2).

[9] At Q 5:43, 44, 46 (x2), 66, 68 and 110.

[10] Though the names of the three previous scriptures do not appear in the second Sūra, Muqātil finds them all referred to already at Q 2:4. He completes the scriptural phrase "and what was sent down before you" with "upon the prophets, meaning al-Tawrāt and al-Injīl and al-Zabūr." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 84.

[11] At Q 7:157, 9:111, 48:29, 61:6 and 62:5. Lazarus-Yafeh asserts that all 18 occurrences appear in "sūras from the Medīnan period." "Tawrāt," 393. Though the present study does not rely on the traditional chronology, it is interesting to note the pattern of occurrence in the first four large *sūra*s of the Qurʾān.

The term Injīl occurs some 12 times in the Qurʾān.[12] The pattern of its occurrence is similar to that of the term Tawrāt: three times in the third Sūra,[13] five times in the fifth Sūra,[14] and beyond the fifth Sūra only four other times.[15] Indeed, in all but two of its occurrences, the term Injīl appears in tandem with Tawrāt.[16]

The singular noun Zabūr occurs some three times in the Qurʾān. The root *z-b-r*, however, appears a total of 13 times.[17] Its pattern of occurrence is quite different from the other two names of scriptures: in the first five *sūra*s, Zabūr appears only once and its plural form only once.[18] The singular Zabūr never appears together with the other two names of scriptures. If fact, it does not even appear in the near contexts of the other names.

The pattern of occurrence of the terms Tawrāt and Injīl, with its concentration in the first five *sūras* and its sparseness beyond, may be compared to the patterns of occurrence of the Qurʾānic terms of tampering to be described later in this chapter. In particular, the flurry of occurrences of both terms in Q 5:43–68, immediately following the fourth occurrence of *ḥarrafa* at Q 5:41, is worthy of note.

The verses in which these scriptures are mentioned by name provide some basic information about the Qurʾānic approach to them. The reader first learns that God "sent down the Torah (*Tawrāt*) and the Gospel (*Injīl*)."[19] The Torah and the Gospel were revealed after the time of Abraham.[20] Subsequently, God taught ʿĪsā the Torah and the Gospel,[21] and ʿĪsā in turn confirmed the truth of the Torah.[22] The Gospel confirms the Torah.[23] The Torah contains "the command (*ḥukm*)

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[12] Cf. Sidney H. Griffith, "Gospel," *EQ* (2002), Vol. 2, 342. Karl Ahrens and other scholars suggest that the Qurʾānic term Injīl comes from the Greek *euangelion* via the Ethiopic *wangēl*. "Christliches im Qoran," *ZDMG* 84 (1930), 24.
[13] At Q 3:3, 48 and 65.
[14] At Q 5:46, 47, 66, 68 & 110.
[15] At Q7:157, 9:111, 48:29 and 57:27.
[16] Injīl appears on its own only at Q 5:47 and 57:27.
[17] Cf. J. Horovitz—[R. Firestone], "Zabūr," *EI2* (2002), Vol. 11, 372; and Dawid Künstlinger, "Die Namen der 'Gottes-Schriften' im Qurān," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 8 (1937), 74–75. The plural form *zubur* is treated below in "Other writings."
[18] At Q 4:163 and 3:184, respectively.
[19] Q 3:3.
[20] Q 3:65.
[21] Q 3:48, 5:110.
[22] Q 3:50, 61:6.
[23] Q 5:46.

of God."[24] God prescribed for the Jews in the Torah, "A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds retaliation" (Q 5:45).[25] Jews and Christians are said to be able to find "the messenger, the *ummī* prophet"[26] "written with them" in the Torah and Gospel.[27] The Qurʾān offers what it terms a 'similitude' of true believers from the Gospel: "like a seed that sends forth its shoot, then makes it strong, it then becomes thick, and it stands straight on its stem, delighting the sowers—that he may enrage the disbelievers with them."[28]

Of the three Zabūr references, we find in two of the verses the concept that God gave the Zabūr to David.[29] At Q 21:105 the third

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[24] Q 5:43.

[25] Closely resembling Exodus 21:23–25; cf. Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21; cf. J. Horovitz, "Tawrāt," 706. Another passage which may be claiming to relay words from the Torah—though that name is not specified—is Q 2:83–84: "And when we took compact with the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents.…'" resembles parts of the Decalogue in Exodus 20. M.S. Seale claims that the Qurʾān provides "a version of the Ten Commandments, even though an incomplete one" at Q 17:23–37. "How the Qur'an Interprets the Bible," in his *Qur'an and Bible: Studies in Interpretation and Dialogue* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 74–75. Hartwig Hirschfeld points out that Muslim commentators like al-Thaʿlabī also found the Decalogue at Q 17:23–37, as well as at 6:152–154. *New Researches*, 81–82. See also William M. Brinner, "An Islamic Decalogue," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 67–84; and Stefan Schreiner, "Der Dekalog in der jüdischen Tradition und im Koran," *Kairos* 23 (1981), 24–30.

[26] English translations of Qurʾānic verses in this chapter are indebted to Arthur Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford University Press, 1964); and occasionally to Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Karachi: Taj Company, n.d.). However, translations sometimes reflect literal renderings of the Arabic original.

[27] Q 7:157.

[28] Q 48:29. Lazarus-Yafeh suggests that this may be a quotation from the Psalms (cf. Psalms 1:3; 72:16; 92:14). "Tawrāt," 393. But Carra de Vaux hears in Q 48:29 an echo of Jesus' parable of the sower. "Indjīl," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma et al, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1927), Vol. 2, 502. Regarding the Qurʾānic approach to the Gospel, Sidney Griffith writes, "In a number of passages the Qurʾān clearly presumes in its audience a prior knowledge of Gospel characters and narratives." "Gospel," 342.

[29] Q 4:163, 17:55. Ṭabarī writes on *zabūr* at 4:163: "It is the name of the book that was revealed to David, just as he named the book that was revealed to Moses as the Tawrāt and that which was revealed to Jesus as the Injīl and that which was revealed to Muḥammad as the *furqān*, because that is the name by which what was revealed to David was known. The Arabs say *zabūr Dāwūd*, and because of that the rest of the peoples know this book." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IX, 402. Muqātil comments on *zabūr* at Q 4:163: "It contains neither statute nor command, neither obligation nor permitted nor forbidden, [but has] 150 *sūras*." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 423.

occurrence of Zabūr is set in the form of a saying of God, that he wrote in that book, "The earth shall be the inheritance of my righteous servants."[30]

"The Book"

In addition to references to particular scriptures, the Qurʾān contains many references to *kitāb* or *al-kitāb*.[31] In some of these occurrences, there are indications which may suggest a particular book. In other passages, however, it is not clear whether a book is meant, or if so which book that might be.[32] By context, many of the occurrences of *kitāb* may be reasonably related to one or more of the earlier scriptures.[33]

A great many occurrences of *kitāb* in the Qurʾān seem to be referring to verbal material that is conceived of as being given at the time of the address.[34] An example of this would be Q 2:89: "When there came

[30] Arie Schippers identifies this with Psalm 37:9, 11 and 29. "Psalms," *EQ* (2004), Vol. 4, 315. Lazarus-Yafeh calls it an exact quote. "Tawrāt," 393. Horovitz writes, "Apart from Sūra xxi.105 the Ḳurʾān contains other passages bearing a close resemblance to verses from the Psalms, especially from Psalm civ. Moreover the majority of the passages in the Ḳurʾān which remind us, by sense and sound, of the Bible, are from the Psalms." "Zabūr," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M. Th. Houtsma et al, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. 4, 1184. See also Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 73–77; and Richard Bell, "Muhammad's Knowledge of the Old Testament," in *Presentation Volume to William Barron Stevenson* (Studia Semitica et Orientalia II) (Glasgow: Glasgow University Oriental Society, 1945), 14, for further suggestions of parallels between the Qurʾān and the Psalms.

[31] Occurrences of *kitāb* both singular and plural number 261. Cf. Daniel Madigan, "Book," *EQ* (2001), Vol. 1, 242. Jeffery provides an overview of these occurrences in "The Qurʾān as Scripture," 47–55.

[32] Wansbrough comments, "*Kitāb* as scripture is seldom differentiated in the Qurʾān, and exactly which scripture is meant can be elicited only from context." *Quranic Studies*, 75. Daniel Madigan argues vigorously that the word *kitāb* seldom signifies a physical text in the Qurʾān, but rather that the word is used metaphorically for divine knowledge and authority. "Book," 242–251. *Idem.*, *The Qurʾân's Self-image: Writing and authority in Islam's scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[33] Herbert Berg observes that "for a large number of Qurʾānic passages that contain the word *kitāb*, Ṭabarī and the early exegetes understood the word to refer to one of or both of the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, namely the Tawrāt and the Injīl." "Ṭabarī's Exegesis," 768. An interesting example of this is when Ṭabarī interprets the phrase in Q 2:2, "*dhālika al-kitāb*," general understood by Muslims to refer to the Qurʾān. Because it is "that *kitāb*" rather than "this *kitāb*," some of Ṭabarī's authorities suggested the phrase must refer to the Torah and Gospel. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 128–129.

[34] Julius Augapfel, "Das *kitāb* im Qurân," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* xxix (1915), 385–386. Cf. Adams, "Qurʾān: The Text and its History," 160–161.

to them a *kitāb* from God, confirming what was with them." Meaning literally "a writing," *kitāb* is sometimes used in the sense of a letter, a document of manumission, or a contract.[35] The term may also refer to a decree or prescription.[36]

When "the book" is associated with Moses, it is reasonable to assume that the Torah is in view. The first canonical reference[37] of this kind is at Q 2:53: "And when we gave to Moses the book and the criterion (*furqān*), that haply you should be guided." The phrase "we gave to Moses the book" repeats at Q 2:87, 6:154, 11:110, 17:2, 25:35, 32:23, and 41:45. At Q 37:117, Aaron is included with Moses in "and we gave them the manifesting book." A similar phrase apparently indicating the Torah is "the book of Moses," at Q 11:17 and 46:11. A third variation is at Q 6:91, "Who sent down the book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men?"

Other verses of the Qurʾān offer a variety of clues that the earlier scriptures may be indicated by "the book."[38] For example, at Q 2:44 the Children of Israel are addressed with the question, "Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite (*tatlūna*) the book?" The same phrase about reciting the book is used about both Jews and Christians at Q 2:113. A second verb describes the action at Q 10:94:

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[35] Jeffery, "The Qurʾān as Scripture," 47. Ṭabarī also defines *kitāb* as "a writing" in the introduction to his commentary. J. Cooper, trans., *The Commentary on the Qurʾān by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43.

[36] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 75; cf. Augapfel, "Das *kitāb* im Qurân," 393.

[37] Throughout this study, Qurʾānic references are presented in canonical order based on the understanding that this is the way in which most Muslims learn and read the Qurʾān, and the way in which most Muslim commentators present their interpretations of the Qurʾān. Most Muslim exegetes start at the beginning of the canon, explain terms, stories and other materials when they first come to them, then refer to these initial explanations when the same materials come up again later on in their commentaries. Cf. Jane McAuliffe, "The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad," in *Bible and Qurʾān: Essays in scriptural intertextuality*, John C. Reeves, ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 113. Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike have indeed developed elaborate chronologies for the initial recitation of the *sūra*s of the Qurʾān. However, "none of the systems of chronological sequencing of qurʾānic chapters and verses has been accepted universally by contemporary scholarship." Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology and the Qurʾān," *EQ* (2001), Vol. 1, 325. Wansbrough asked if a critical assessment had been made of the basic principle of whether a chronology of Muslim scripture is feasible. *Quranic Studies*, 126. In any case, the focus of this study is not the development of the tampering theme within the Qurʾān according to accepted schemes of chronology, but rather the development of that theme by Muslim exegetes within works of *tafsīr*.

[38] Augapfel, "Das *kitāb* im Qurân," 386–390.

"If thou art in doubt regarding what we have sent down to thee, ask those who recite (*yaqra'ūna*) the book before thee." At Q 6:156, "the book" seems to indicate a more elastic concept: "The book was sent down only upon two parties before us, and we have indeed been heedless of their study (*dirāsa*)." All of these verses could be reasonably interpreted to allude to the Torah and/or the Gospel.

The phrase "the book of God" occurs some nine times in the Qurʾān. From its context at Q 5:44, this phrase seems to indicate the Torah: "Surely we sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment for those of Jewry, as did the masters and the rabbis, following such portion of the book of God as they were given to keep and were witnesses to." At Q 2:101, "a party of them that were given the book reject the book of God behind their backs." It would be reasonable to assume that the phrase here refers to an earlier scripture.[39] Other occurrences of the phrase are more difficult to identify, and this is reflected by an ambivalence in the exegetical tradition.[40]

In Q 2:177, "true piety" is described as, among other things, believing in "God and the last day, and the angels, and the book (*kitāb*), and the messengers." A similar formula appears twice in the Qurʾān with *kitāb* in the plural. The messenger believes in "God, his angels, his books (*kutub*) and his messengers."[41] In Q 66:12, Mary "confirmed the words of her Lord and his books." A further use of the plural comes in Q 98:2–3: "A messenger from God, reciting pages (*ṣuḥuf*) purified, therein true books."[42] These and other occurrences of *kitāb* do not seem to come with the suggestion that a corrupted text is in mind, or that an earlier scripture has been or is in the process of being corrupted. The straightforward impression to take from them is that the writings or prescriptions being alluded to are thought of in a positive and respectful way.

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[39] At Q 2:101, Muqātil explains "the book of God" as "what is in the Torah from the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 126.

[40] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 75. See Berg, "Ṭabarī's Exegesis," 772–773 on *kitāb allāh*: "in his commentary to the Qurʾān's use of the expression the *kitāb* of God, al-Ṭabarī explains the term using the full variation of the term *kitāb* generally except, oddly, the Qurʾān itself." (773) At the occurrence of "the *kitāb* of God" in Q 3:23, Ṭabarī explicitly says, "it is the Torah." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 290.

[41] Q 2:285; cf. 4:136, where the belief is both in the book which God sent down before, and in the books of God.

[42] These are four of the five occurrences of *kutub* in the Qurʾān. The fifth is at Q 34:44.

Other Writings

The Qur᾽ān also contains a number of other terms for written records which may be understood to refer for earlier scriptures. These include references to scrolls, parchments, tablets and revealed books.[43] For example, Q 53:36–37 mentions "the scrolls (*ṣuḥuf*) of Moses and Abraham." The same writings are called "the former pages" (*ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*) at Q 87:18.[44] There is also mention of parchments at Q 6:91 in connection with "the book which Moses brought": "You put it into parchments (*qarāṭīs*)."[45] A second word for parchment appears at Q 52:1–3: "By the Mount (*Ṭūr*) and a book inscribed in a parchment (*raqq*) unrolled."[46]

The word tablets (*alwāḥ*) comes three times in Sūra 7 in the context of an extended narrative about Moses and the Children of Israel. At Q 7:145, God declares, "We wrote for him on the tablets (*al-alwāḥ*)[47] of everything an admonition (*mawʿiẓa*), and a distinguishing (*tafṣīl*) of everything." In the meantime the Children of Israel make a golden calf and Moses discovers it. He puts down the tablets (Q 7:150) in order to discipline his brother Aaron. His prayer to God seems to calm him down. "And when Moses' anger abated in him, he took the tablets; and in the inscription (*nuskha*)[48] of them was guidance (*hudan*), and mercy (*raḥma*) unto all those who hold their Lord in awe" (Q 7:154).[49]

Another term for revealed writings, *al-zubur*, appears at Q 3:184, 16:44 and 35:25; at 26:196 it comes in a possessive construction, "the scriptures of the ancients (*al-awwalīn*)."[50] Two of these verses put the term *zubur* in a parallel relationship with "the clear signs" (*bayyināt*)

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[43] Künstlinger, "Die Namen der 'Gottes-Schriften' im Qurān," 71–84, gives a wide variety of terms which he says refer to scripture in the Qur᾽ān. Besides those treated here, Künstlinger investigates such terms as *dhikr, ḥikma, furqān, qawl*, and *āya*.

[44] Madigan, "Book," 245. The phrase *al-ṣuḥūf al-ūlā* also appears at Q 20:133. Further on *ṣuḥuf*: Künstlinger, "Die Namen der 'Gottes-Schriften' im Qurān," 72–74.

[45] The second occurrence of this word is at Q 6:7: "had we sent down on thee a book on parchment (*qirṭāsin*)…."

[46] An *hapax legomenon*. On "parchment," see Julian Obermann, "Koran and Agada: The Events at Mount Sinai," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages* lvii (1941), 30.

[47] See Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 37, on "tablets."

[48] Translation of Arberry and Pickthall. *Nuskha* is also defined as "transcript" or "copy."

[49] Of the remaining three occurrences of this root in the Qur᾽ān, one is the singular *lawḥ* in, "Nay, but it is a glorious Qur᾽ān in a guarded tablet" (Q 85:21–22).

[50] Horowitz, "Zabūr," 1184. Horowitz adds that occurrences of *al-zubur* at Q 54:43 & 52 refer to heavenly writings in which human deeds are recorded.

and "the illuminating book" (*al-kitāb al-munīr*).[51] A third occurrence lists *zubur* with "the clear signs" and "the remembrance" (*al-dhikr*).[52] At Q 26:196 the term could be said to be in parallel with "the revelation (*tanzīl*)" in Q 26:192.[53]

The Word of God

From among other expressions in the Qurʾān which might be taken to allude to the previous scriptures, mention should be made of *kalām* and *kalim*. These words appear in the *ḥarrafa* passages to be studied later; and Muslim exegetes, including those examined in this investigation, sometimes identify these terms with particular scriptures.

Of the four occurrences of *kalim* ("words; utterances")[54] in Muslim scripture, three occurrences come in three of the four *ḥarrafa* verses in focus in this study (Q 4:46, 5:13, 5:41).[55] *Kalim* is the object of the tampering verb in these verses. The fourth occurrence is at Q 35:10: "Whosoever desires glory, the glory altogether belongs to God. To him good words (*kalim*) go up, and the righteous deed—he uplifts it."

The term *kalām* ("speech, word") similarly occurs only four times in the Qurʾān, always in association with God. One of those occurrences comes in the first *ḥarrafa* verse of this study (Q 2:75), where it is also the object of the tampering verb. A second occurrence is explicitly linked with God's revelation to Moses: "He said, 'Moses, I have chosen thee above all men for my messages and my utterance (*kalāmī*); take what I have given thee, and be of the thankful.' And we wrote for him on the tablets of everything of admonition, and a distinguishing of everything" (Q 7:144–145). The other two appearances of *kalām Allāh* do not seem to be associated with an earlier revelation, but rather with a Muslim statement of faith (Q 9:6) and a commandment to fight (Q 48:15).

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[51] Q 3:184, 35:25.
[52] Q 16:44.
[53] Cf. Horowitz—[Firestone], "Zabūr," 372.
[54] Collective form of *kalima*.
[55] Wansbrough commented that in these verses, "*kalim* requires to be understood as scripture." *Quranic Studies*, 76. Thomas O'Shaughnessy agreed that *kalim* refers to the revealed words of the Torah. *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1948), 16. Investigation of the commentaries below will reveal whether Muqātil and Ṭabarī understood the term thus.

The Claim of Confirmation

Another indication of the approach to the earlier scriptures in the Qurʾān comes from the language of confirmation. A series of verses seems to claim that what God is now revealing to the addressees of the Qurʾān has essential links to revelations of the past.

The term *muṣaddiq*, from *ṣaddaqa*, means confirming, attesting, or pronouncing to be true,[56] as in its first Qurʾānic appearance, "And believe in that I have sent down, confirming (*muṣaddiqan*) that which is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it" (Q 2:41). This active participle occurs some 18 times in the Qurʾān. Of that total, 14 occurrences are distributed throughout Sūras 2–6. Beyond Sūra 6 there are four occurrences, two of them in Sūra 46.[57] In addition to this, the term *taṣdīq*,[58] verbal noun of *ṣaddaqa*, appears at Q 10:37 and 12:111.

The object of the participle and verbal noun is generally one of a number of indistinct phrases which could be understood to refer to earlier scriptures. The most frequent object is *mā bayna yadayhi*[59] and similar phrases at Q 2:97; 3:3, 50; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31; 46:30; and 61:6. A second frequent object is "what is with them"[60] and similar phrases at Q 2:41, 89, 91, 101; 3:81; and 4:47. The subject of confirmation in those verses is generally "what I have sent down" (Q 2:41) and similar phrases. "A book (*kitāb*)" or "the book" is frequently specified; at Q 2:89 "a book from God"; and in one of the *taṣdīq* verses, "this *qurʾān*" (Q 10:27). Other subjects include "a messenger" (Q 3:81) and "a messenger from God" (Q 2:101).

The Torah appears as the object of confirmation at Q 3:50, 5:46 and 61:6. In those verses, the subjects are ʿĪsā and the scripture sent down upon him, the Injīl. At Q 46:12, the Torah is updated by "*hādha kitāb*": "Before it was the book of Moses for a model and a mercy; and this is a book confirming, in Arabic tongue, to warn the evildoers, and good tidings to the good-doers."[61] At Q 3:39, angels say to Zakariyya,

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[56] Wansbrough renders *muṣaddiq* as "verification of earlier prophets and scriptures," *Quranic Studies*, 65.

[57] At Q 6:92, 35:31, 46:12 & 30, and 61:6.

[58] Confirmation, attestation; belief; assent, agreement, approval.

[59] Frequently translated "that which was before it," but which means literally "what is between his two hands." Madigan renders it "…what is already present." *The Qur'ân's Self-Image*, 137.

[60] *mā maʿahum*.

[61] "An exegetically justifiable paraphrase for this would read: 'Before the Qurʾān was the Tawrāh as a guide and a mercy. This Qurʾān is a book in an Arabic tongue

"God gives you good tidings of Yaḥyā, confirming a word (*kalima*) from God."

In two of the verses there appear parallel phrases which shed light on the meaning of confirmation. The first is at Q 5:48: "We sent to you the book in truth, confirming (*muṣaddiq*) what is before it from the book, and guarding it in safety (*muhaymin*)." The second is at Q 10:37: "it is a confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of what is before it, and a distinguishing (*tafṣīl*) of the book, wherein is no doubt."

The impression given by these verses containing *muṣaddiq* or *taṣdīq* is that the revelation conceived of as being sent down by God in the present is thought to align with what God has sent down in the past.[62] There seems to be a claim of correspondence. These verses vouch for the truth of earlier revelations, which is the sense of *ṣaddaqa*. At the same time these verses bring the authority of past revelations to bear on the present revelation. This helps the reader understand the context for the verses of tampering in the Qurʾān, and also indicates one expression which may have been in the minds of the exegetes when they set about to explain the meaning of the verses of tampering.

Characterizations of the Earlier Scriptures

The Qurʾān provides qualitative descriptions of the earlier scriptures which appear to be uniformly respectful. A striking example is at Q 6:154: "Then we gave Moses the book, complete for him who does good, and distinguishing every thing, and as a guidance (*hudan*) and a mercy (*raḥma*)." These and other epithets repeat throughout the Qurʾān. The Torah is characterized as containing "guidance and light (*nūr*)."[63] The same phrase is used to describe the contents of the Gospel.[64] The Gospel is also called "a guidance and an admonition (*mawʿiẓa*) to the godfearing."[65] The Torah is said to contain "the judgment (*ḥukm*) of God."[66] The book given to Moses is described as a guidance to the Children of Israel.[67] God also gave "the book of

which confirms the Tawrāh in order to warn….'" McAuliffe, "The Qurʾānic Context," 142.

[62] "The general position of the Qurʾān is that it confirms previous revelations, and in particular…of the Torah and the Evangel." Watt, "The Early Attitude," 50.

[63] Q 5:44.

[64] Q 5:46.

[65] Q 5:46.

[66] Q 5:43.

[67] Q 17:2, 32:23.

Moses" for a standard (*imām*) and a mercy.[68] The tablets which God wrote for Moses contain "an admonition and a distinguishing (*tafṣīl*) of everything."[69] The book given to Moses and Aaron is described as the "manifesting" (*mustabīn*) book.[70]

In other contexts, the Qurʾānic approach to the earlier scriptures can be seen in the actions which are associated with them. At Q 3:93, for example, is an appeal to opponents in the midst of a polemical situation to "Bring you the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful."[71] A similar understanding is given at Q 10:94: "If you are in doubt regarding what we have sent down to you, ask those who recite the book before you." These verses seem to indicate that the Torah was readily available, and could be produced to resolve disputes or answer questions.[72] They also suggest a measure of authority to the contents of Torah. A third situation of this type is in view at Q 5:43, where the Torah is said to be with (*ʿinda*) the Jews, and to contain God's decision. At Q 5:44, the prophets and religious leaders of the Jews are said to have judged the Jews according to the Torah, and these leaders were entrusted with the protection of "the book of God."[73] Similarly, the "people of the Gospel" are urged to make their judgments according to the contents of Gospel.[74] All of the People of the Book are also challenged to "stand fast" or act according to the Torah and Gospel.[75]

These Qurʾānic descriptions of the earlier scriptures appear to be uniformly positive and respectful.[76] The most natural impression to

[68] Q 11:17, 46:12.

[69] Q 7:145.

[70] Q 37:117.

[71] Brannon Wheeler writes on Q 3:93, "At issue is not the revelatory status of the Torah or the accusation that the text of the Torah has been altered. On the contrary, the exegesis of Q 3:93 depends on the Torah to make its case." "Israel and the Torah of Muḥammad," in *Bible and Qurʾān: Essays in scriptural intertextuality*, John C. Reeves, ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 79.

[72] Camilla Adang adds to this category Q 16:43 and 21:7: "Ask the people of the remembrance (*dhikr*) if you don't know!" "Torah," 303.

[73] But cf. Q 62:5—"The likeness of those who have been loaded with the Torah, then they have not carried it, is as the likeness of an ass carrying books."

[74] Q 5:47.

[75] Q 5:66 & 68. Cf. 7:169, in the context of a narrative about the Children of Israel: "And those who hold fast to the *kitāb*, and perform the prayer—surely we leave not to waste the wage of those who set aright."

[76] Lazarus-Yafeh wrote: "The Ḳurʾān accepts the *Tawrāt* and *Indjīl* as genuine divine revelations taken from the same Guarded Tablets as the Ḳurʾān itself and brought by true messengers to both Jews and Christians respectively." "Taḥrīf," 111. Carra de Vaux referred to "the great reverence with which the Qurʾān" speaks of the Gospel.

take from them would be that they represent a conception of sacred texts which are available and intact. There does not seem to be any hint, in any of the verses mentioned above, that the recitations which are conceived of as being presently "sent down" contradict the contents of the earlier scriptures. There is no evident suggestion in these verses that any of the scriptures exists in an altered state. The associations of the terms *kalām* and *kalim* ('word/words') with the verb *ḥarrafa* will be thoroughly examined below. Otherwise, the references to earlier scriptures in the Qurʾān would not seem to trigger thoughts of their corruption.

These descriptions of the earlier scriptures in turn provide a context for the exegetical development of the motif of tampering. The exegete who wants to write about the earlier scriptures will be constrained to keep in mind what the Qurʾān itself says about them. If he chooses to go against the characterizations found in Muslim scripture, he risks his reader's accusation of contradicting the word of God.

The Semantic Field of Tampering

In the Qurʾān there is also a range of language which appears to indicate a variety of actions of tampering. The precise explanation of these actions is not given in the Qurʾān, nor are the actors or the objects of their actions frequently specified. Yet a number of verbs and associated expressions seem to work together to form a semantic field of tampering. An accurate investigation of the dimensions of this seman-

"Indjīl," 503. William Muir concluded, after an extensive survey of Qurʾānic passages which refer to the earlier scriptures, "The highest value is attributed by the Corân to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. They are always spoken of with veneration. There is not a single expression regarding them throughout the Corân, but what is dictated by profound respect and reverence." *The Corân: Its Composition and Teaching; And the Testimony it Bears to the Holy Scriptures* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895), 222. More recently, Abdullah Saeed has echoed Muir's conclusion: "In no verse in the Qurʾān is there a denigrating remark about the scriptures of the Jews and Christians. Instead, there is respect and reverence. Any disparaging remarks were about the People of the Book, individuals or groups, and their actions." "The Charge of Distortion," 429. Matthias Radscheit, reflecting on the impression left by the Qurʾānic material related to tampering with scriptures, writes, "That it did not mean falsification of the fixed written Torah or Gospel shows itself—negatively—in that *taḥrīf* is never connected explicitly with these books, and—positively—by the verses which exhort the *ahl al-kitāb* to hold to what is in their scriptures." *Die koranische Herausforderung*, 82–83.

tic field in the Qurʾān is crucial for determining which passages in the commentaries must be examined for the exegetical development of the tampering motif.

Various scholars have indicated the roots which might be considered essential to the semantic field of tampering. Wansbrough identified three roots: *kitmān, tabdīl* and *taḥrīf*.[77] Buhl also indicated three roots, but not the same three: in place of *kitmān* he put *layy*.[78] Lazarus-Yafeh included the three roots of Wansbrough, and added *layy*.[79] Mustansir Mir drew attention to *taḥrīf, layy* and *ikhfāʾ*.[80] Caspar and Gaudeul identified a larger field of six roots which relate to alteration: *taḥrīf, tabdīl, kitmān, labs, layy*, and *nisyān*.[81] This part of the study will investigate all seven roots identified by these scholars, plus a third verb of concealment, *asarra*.

The methodology for studying a semantic field is set out by Toshihiko Izutsu in his *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*.[82] Izutsu calls his method of semantic analysis a "contextual interpretation" in which the semantic category of a word is described in terms of the conditions in which it is used.[83] The aim of the procedure is "To bring together, compare, and put in relation all the terms that resemble, oppose, and correspond with each other."[84] Not every context is helpful for determining the meaning of a word, but Izutsu identifies seven cases in which a passage may assume "strategic importance for the method of semantic analysis."[85] The passage may contain a "contextual definition" of the word in question. Failing that, there may be a synonym or another term in parallel relationship with the word. Meaning can also be drawn from a contrasting term or from the negative form of the word. Further meaning may come from a semantic cluster from which the term in focus appears to be inseparable. The use of a word in a non-religious context may also shed light on its meaning in a religious context.

77 *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.
78 "Taḥrīf," (*EI1*), 618–619.
79 "Taḥrīf," (*EI2*), 111.
80 *Dictionary of Qurʾānic Terms and Concepts*, 55.
81 "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 62–63; affirmed in McAuliffe, "The Qurʾānic Context," 144.
82 (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), 35–41.
83 *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 13.
84 *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 36.
85 *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 37f.

Izutsu defines a semantic field as any set of patterned semantic relations between certain words of a language. He writes, “A word rarely stands aloof from others and maintains its existence all alone; on the contrary, words manifest everywhere a very marked tendency to combine with certain others in the contexts of occurrence.”[86] It will be seen in this study that the eight verbal roots of tampering begin very quickly to interact and entangle. Their meanings also seem to be influenced by the objects attached to them, and by repeating idioms and associated verbs in the surrounding contexts.

The eight roots will be studied generally in the order in which they appear canonically in the Qurʾān. However, the verbs of concealment will be grouped together. In examining each of the roots, major attention will be given to usages which might be reasonably connected with the theme of tampering with the revelation of God. Some observations will also be made on other theological uses, or even on mundane uses if these seem helpful for clarifying meaning. At the end of this section the occurrences of the various terms in the semantic field of tampering in Sūras 2–7, as well as indications of earlier scriptures in the same *sūra*s, will be set out in the form of a chart.

Labasa, *to confound*

The first root in the semantic field of tampering to appear in the Qurʾān is the verb *labasa*. It occurs in the form of a command, “Do not confound (*talbisū*) the truth (*ḥaqq*) with vanity (*bāṭil*)” (Q 2:42). The context is the beginning of a long passage addressed to the “Children of Israel.” The same phrase comes at Q 3:71 in the form of a challenge to the Children of Israel, “Why do you confound the truth with vanity?”

Labasa means to confuse, bewilder, or confound, a person, or to fill a person with doubts.[87] This verb occurs seven times in the Qurʾān, and five of those occurrences are in Sūra 6. In addition to “truth,” the objects of *labasa* include belief (*īmān*) (Q 6:82) and religion (*dīn*) (Q 6:138). God is the subject of *labasa* at Q 6:9 & 65: “We would certainly have confused for them the thing which they themselves are

[86] *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the* Qurʾān, 40.

[87] *WKAS*, Band II, Teil 1, 128. *Labasa* is given in *WKAS* as the second meaning of the verb *labisa*. *WKAS*, Band II, Teil 1, 128–129.

confusing" (Q 6:9).[88] Where a second object marked by *bi-* occurs, as in Q 2:42 and 3:71, *labasa* means to make something confused by means of another thing; or to mix, jumble, tangle something up with another thing.[89] The verbal noun *labs* means confusion, perplexity, obscurity or doubtfulness.[90] It appears once, at Q 50:15: "they are in uncertainty (*labs*) as to the new creation."

Verbs of Concealing: katama, asarra, akhfā

Three verbs for concealing make up a significant part of the semantic field of tampering. The verb *katama* appears just after the first occurrence of *labasa*, in the very same verse. The context is a diatribe against the Children of Israel, and the audience is commanded, "do not conceal (*katama*) the truth (*ḥaqq*) willingly" (Q 2:42). This phrase appears together in a parallel construction with "do not confound," and thus seems to take from it the sense of hiding for the sake of confusing.[91] In the Qurʾān, the root *katama* appears only in Form I, which means to conceal or keep secret.[92] All of the 21 Qurʾānic occurrences of this root—but one—are in the imperfect. The verbal noun *kitmān* does not appear in the Qurʾān.

"Truth" is the object of that first significant appearance of *katama* in the Qurʾān. This might be understood to refer to an earlier scripture, because immediately preceding the imperative to *not* conceal is another command, "believe in that I have sent down, confirming that which is with you" (Q 2:41). Verb and object, as well as adverb, appear again in Q 2:146: "there is a party of them conceal the truth and that wittingly." Preceding this statement in the immediate context is the phrase, "the evildoers whom we have given the book" (Q 2:145–6). All three words appear a third time in a polemical question in Q 3:71, "People of the Book! Why do you… conceal the truth and that wittingly?" This verse comes right after another question, "Why do you disbelieve in God's signs (*āyāt*)" (Q 3:70).

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[88] Ṭabarī pulls in this phrase from Q 6:9 to explain the first occurrence of *labasa* at Q 2:42. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 567.

[89] *WKAS*, Band II, Teil 1, 128.

[90] *WKAS*, Band II, Teil 1, 138.

[91] Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1980), 18.

[92] *WKAS*, Band I, 50.

Another object which could be taken to refer to earlier revelation is "testimony": "And who does greater evil than he who conceals (*katama*) a testimony (*shahāda*) received from God?" (Q 2:140). Other objects which may perhaps refer to God's revelation are "the clear signs" (*bayyināt*) and "the guidance" (*hudā*): "Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after we have shown them clearly in the book—they shall be cursed by God and the cursers" (Q 2:159).

The book (*kitāb*) is specified as the object of *katama* in Q 2:174: "Those who conceal what of the book God has sent down on them, and sell it for a little price." The same object seems to be in view in Q 3:187, where the audience is described as "those who had been given the book." The message is, "You shall make it clear unto the people, and not conceal it." This use of 'conceal' is associated in this verse with rejecting the book "behind their backs" and selling the book "for a small price."

Uses of *katama* which do not seem to be related to God's revelation include the very first canonical appearance of the root in Q 2:33. In an account of Adam's "naming," God tells the angels, "I know what things you reveal, and what you were hiding." This and similar phrases are used to indicate that God knows what is hidden to human view, for example the thoughts of people who enter houses not their own (Q 24:29). In the story of God's command to the Children of Israel to sacrifice a cow, the inner thoughts of the people were exposed: "God disclosed what you were hiding" (Q 2:72). On the Day of Judgment, unbelievers will not be able to conceal from God "one tiding" (Q 4:42). One subset of this category of uses of *katama* would be the hiding of thoughts before the messenger. In Q 3:167, people hide their true thoughts in the heart when giving a reason for not fighting. The People of the Book profess faith in the messenger, but they in fact do not believe, and "God knows very well what they were hiding" (Q 5:61).

Non-theological uses of *katama* also help to bring out its meaning. For example, the object of concealment in Q 5:106 is the "testimony of God" (cf. Q 2:284), but the context is legal and a "bequeathing" at the time of death is intended. Similarly, a "pledge" or "trust" is concealed in Q 2:284. In Q 4:37, the 'niggardly' appear to conceal their wealth. At Q 2:228, in the context of a ruling on divorce, it is not lawful for women to hide "what God has created in their wombs."

The verb *katama* appears several times together with contrasting verbs. Examples given above include Q 2:33: "I know what things you

reveal (*tubdūna*), and what you were hiding." The verb *abdā* means "to disclose, reveal, manifest." Another contrasting verb is *bayyana* in Q 3:187: "…to make it clear (*tubayyinunnahu*) unto the people, and not conceal it." And a third pairing comes at Q 21:110, "Surely he knows what is spoken aloud (*jahra*) and he knows what you hide." *Jahra* is the verbal noun of *jahara*, which means "to be brought to light; to declare publicly, announce." These three contrasting verbs suggest that the fault of *katama* is a failure of various groups or individuals to make public a truth in their possession.

The pattern of *katama* in the Qurʾān appears to be worth noting. Of the 21 occurrences of this verbal root, nearly half—ten—come in the second Sūra. The verb appears three times in the third Sūra, twice in the fourth Sūra, three times in the fifth, and only three times elsewhere. This allows the root to establish its presence and significance firmly early in the course of a canonical hearing/reading of the Muslim scripture.

A second verb of concealing, *asarra*, appears in the context of the first *ḥarrafa* verse at Q 2:77: "God knows what they keep secret (*yusirrūna*) and what they publish." *Asarra*, which occurs 20 times in the Qurʾān, means to conceal, suppress or keep secret.[93] This verb does not appear frequently in Sūras 2–7, but it does occur at Q 5:52: "for that they kept secret within them." An occurrence of the verb in ordinary usage comes in the Qurʾānic story of Joseph, with Joseph himself as the object. "So they hid him as merchandise; but God knew what they were doing" (Q 12:19).

A third verb of concealing, *akhfā*, appears in Q 2:284 immediately after a double occurrence of *katama*: "Whether you publish what is in your hearts or hide it (*tukhfūhu*), God shall make reckoning with you for it." *Akhfā* means to hide, conceal or cover.[94] One of the 17 occurrences of this form in the Qurʾān is in the context of the third appearance of *ḥarrafa* at Q 5:15, where the messenger is to make clear to the People of the Book "many things you have been concealing (*tukhfūna*) of the book." An occurrence of *akhfā* which seems to be explicitly connected with a scripture comes at Q 6:91: "They measured not God with his true measure when they said, 'God has not sent down aught on any mortal.' Say, 'Who sent down the book that Moses brought as a light

[93] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 4, 1337.
[94] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 776.

and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding (*tukhfūna*) much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers.'"

Baddala, *to substitute*

The third root to appear in the canonical progression is the verb *baddala*, which means to substitute, change or alter to something else.[95] A number of the 33 Qurʾānic occurrences of *baddala* seem to indicate the substitution or change of words, and identify this as an evil act. The first appearance of the verb is of this kind: "Then the evildoers substituted (*baddala*) a saying (*qawl*) other than that which had been said to them" (Q 2:59). The context is a narrative about Moses and the Children of Israel. The very same verb form and object comes again in Q 7:162, similarly in the midst of a story about Moses and the "twelve tribes."

The object of *baddala* is "the word of God" (*kalām Allāh*) at Q 48:15: "…desiring to change the word of God." The subject seems to be the Bedouins, and the concern is participation in battle. In another passage the object is "a recitation (*qurʾān*)," and the opponents of the messenger command him to change it. God instructs the messenger to reply, "It is not for me to alter (*baddala*) it" (Q 10:15). Elsewhere, objects indistinct in themselves may possibly be understood to indicate revelation. An example is Q 2:211: "Whoso changes (*baddala*) the blessing (*niʿma*) of God after it has come to him, God is terrible in retribution." This clause is immediately preceded in the verse by the command, "Ask the Children of Israel how many a clear sign (*āya*) we gave them."

While some of these occurrences of *baddala* appear to suggest a tampering action associated with the revelation of God, a series of verses in the Qurʾān declares confidently that humans cannot change the words of God. "No man can change (*lā mubaddila*) the words (*kalimāt*) of God" (Q 6:34).[96] The same active participle of *baddala* is used in Q 6:115, where the object is "his words." At Q 18:27 we find the very same phrase as in 6:115. The same object is used with the verbal noun of *baddala* at Q 10:65: "There is no changing (*tabdīl*) the words

[95] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 1, 167.
[96] Matthias Radscheit suggests that "*kalimāt* mostly refers to former revelations." "Word of God," *EQ* (2006), Vol. 5, 547–8.

of God." A related expression comes at Q 50:29, where God declares, "the word (*qawl*) is not changed (*baddala*, passive) with me."

A notable use of *baddala* with God as the subject is Q 16:101: "And when we exchange (*baddala*) a verse (*āya*) in the place of another verse." Here God is the subject of a construction which in most other Qurʾānic contexts seems to imply a negative action. Another interesting use of the verb is in the phrase, "you shall find no changing (*tabdīl*) the wont (*sunna*) of God" (Q 33:62) in relation to the slaughter of hypocrites. An identical phrase appears to relate to divine involvement in battle at Q 48:23. However, the *sunna* of God seems to indicate something quite different at Q 35:43, where the theme is the sending of warners and the appropriate human response: "And you shall never find any changing (*tabdīl*) the wont of God, and you shall never find any altering (*taḥwīl*) the wont of God." The parallel relationship with *ḥawwala* may bring the sense of "transforming" or "turning" to the meaning of *baddala*.

Ḥarrafa, *to tamper with*

The fourth verb in the semantic field of tampering to make its appearance is the verb *ḥarrafa*. Though this verb—especially through its verbal noun *taḥrīf*—is one of the best known Arabic words for tampering, it in fact occurs only a few times in the Qurʾān. The verbal noun *taḥrīf* does not appear at all. The four occurrences of this root appear to be associated with a revelation from God. Its first occurrence is of this type: "…a party of them that heard God's word (*kalām*), and then tampered with it (*yuḥarrifūnahu*)" (Q 2:75).

Ḥarrafa is generally defined as "to change." However, chapters 4 and 5 below will show that early exegetes understood a range of meanings from this verb. Edward Lane gave the sense of *ḥarrafa* as "he altered." He cited a series of uses of this verb, including causing (hearts) to turn away; turning (a knife) obliquely in nibbing; and imitating the cutting (of a sword) with its edge.[97] He further offered that the verbal noun *taḥrīf* came to signify the perverting of language; the altering of a word in form; the mistranscribing of a word in any manner; or the altering of a word by substituting one letter, or more, for another, or others.[98] Interestingly, Lane points out that the active

[97] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 549.
[98] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 549.

participle of *ḥarrafa* is used outside of the Qurʾān in an expression for God, *muḥarrifu al-qulūb*, meaning the turner, incliner or mover of hearts.[99]

The other three occurrences of *ḥarrafa* in the Qurʾān share the same object and possibly the same subject. The first of these is Q 4:46: "Some of the Jews tamper with (*yuḥarrifūna*) words (*kalim*) from their places (*mawāḍiʿ*)." The wording of Q 5:13 and 5:41 is very similar. The object "*kalim*" in these verses, along with "*kalām*" in Q 2:75, might possibly be understood to refer to earlier scriptures, as noted earlier in this chapter. The subject of all three verses may be the Jews, or at least the People of the Book. The context of all three seems to be a discussion of God's dealings with the Children of Israel. While these contextual clues do not help to precisely define the action signified by *ḥarrafa*, they suggest an action of tampering with revelation.

Apart from these four occurrences of *ḥarrafa*, the verbal root appears only twice elsewhere in the Qurʾān, and little information can be gained from those uses. In Q 8:16, a physical action is indicated: "Whoso turns his back that day to them, unless withdrawing (*mutaḥarrif*) to fight again…" (Form V). *Taḥarrafa* has the sense of "to turn off, branch off, take a turning." The final appearance is at Q 22:11: "And among men there is such a one as serves God upon the very edge (*ḥarf*)…." The noun *ḥarf* refers to the (cutting) edge (of a knife or sword), and also means "a border, rim, or verge."

Muslim exegetes have sometimes attempted to provide a definition for the verb *ḥarrafa*, as we shall discover in the examination of Ṭabarī's commentary below. The 13th-century scholar al-Rāzī discussed the verb in his commentary *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* where *ḥarrafa* first appears at Q 2:75.[100] He cited al-Qaffāl to the effect that *taḥrīf* means alteration (*taghyīr*) and substitution of one thing for another (*tabdīl*).[101] The origin of the word is in the act of bending (*inḥirāf*) or slanting in order to avoid something, said al-Qaffāl, quoting Q 8:16 (*mutaḥarrif*) for support. The meaning of *taḥrīf* is thus to cause something to deviate (*imāla*) from what is true, as a writing reed is called 'corrupted' (*muḥarraf*) if its point has been trimmed askew (*māʾil*).[102] In relation

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[99] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 551.
[100] *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 132–5.
[101] *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 134.
[102] *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 134. Cf. Gaudeul and Caspar, "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 65.

to the Jews, al-Rāzī indicated four possible types of *taḥrīf*: substitution of one term in the Torah for another; false interpretation (the sense al-Rāzī preferred); insincere adherence to Muḥammad's words; and inverting the precepts of God in the Torah—for example a punishment of beating instead of stoning.[103]

Arthur Jeffery defined *ḥarrafa* as "to change the letters," apparently on the strength of *ḥarrafa* sharing the same root letters with *ḥarf* ("letter," pl. *ḥurūf*).[104] Jeffery explained, "Each radical in the root of a Semitic word is a *ḥarf*, and to make play with these radicals in a word would be to do what is meant by *ḥarrafa*."[105] Julian Obermann offered an explanation of the entire phrase which appears at Q 4:46: "Literally, *yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihi* can only mean that they, the Israelites, changed the wording, of a sentence or statement, as to its given order: *they altered the words from their* (rightful) *places*."[106]

Lawā, *to twist*

Another root which occurs in association with alteration of God's revelation is the verb *lawā*. The verb first appears in Q 3:78: "There is a sect of them twist their tongues with the book, that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book." The context is a discussion of "a party of the People of the Book" (Q 3:72f.) who "speak falsehood against God" (Q 3:75; cf. 3:78). The accusation of twisting also comes soon after accusations of confounding and concealing (Q 3:71).

The verb *lawā* appears only five times in the Qurʾān. The verb means to turn, twist, wind, or bend, something; to turn something up or

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103 *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 134–5. Cf. Di Matteo, "Il 'Taḥrīf' od Alterazione," 65. Watt writes that "The meanings ascribed to the word *yuḥarrifūna* in commentaries and dictionaries are the outcome of the subsequent discussions and do not necessarily give much insight into the meaning of the passage at the time of revelation." "The Early Development," 51–52. (Again, as queried in chapter 1, how feasible is it to speak of the meaning of the Qurʾān apart from commentary?)

104 "Ghevond's Text," 280.

105 "The Qurʾān as Scripture," 260.

106 Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 40, italics are his. Whether or not a phrase in a text "can only mean" one thing seems to be open to discussion. In any case, the aim of this study is to discover what exegetes in the earliest era of commentary understood the verbs of tampering in the Qurʾān to mean. The meaning given to a Qurʾānic expression from a distance of over a millennium may well be different from what the Muslims scholars of the first Islamic centuries understood.

down; or to turn something away.[107] At Q 3:78, the object of the verb appears to be "their tongues" rather than "the book." In Q 4:46, the object is not clear and the Jews are "twisting with their tongues and traducing religion." In this clause, twisting seems to be in a parallel relationship with traducing (*ṭaʿn*). *Ṭaʿn*, the verbal noun of *ṭaʿana*, means "piercing, attack, accusation, defamation," and thus lends a sense of verbal insult to *lawā*. The context of Q 4:46 also appears to be a highly-charged polemical situation in which those who were given a share of the book "purchase error" (Q 4:44f.). The accusation of twisting comes immediately after an accusation of tampering with words from their places (Q 4:46).

The other occurrences of *lawā* seem to refer to physical actions. At Q 3:153, the verb appears in a context of conflict: "When you were going up, not twisting about for anyone." In Q 63:5, the hypocrites "twist their heads" and turn their faces away from God's messenger. The verb seems to be used metaphorically for a moral action in Q 4:135: "If you twist (*talwu*) or turn away, God is aware of the things you do."

Nasiya, *to forget*

The final root in the semantic field of tampering is the verb *nasiya*. This verb occurs in close proximity to other roots of tampering in Q 5:13–14. The accusation is first made of the Children of Israel, "they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of" (Q 5:13). Then in the next verse the very same phrase is applied to the Christians.

The verb *nasiya* means to forget, and may also possibly take on the morally culpable sense of "to neglect."[108] Most of the occurrences of this verb in the Qurʾān are not related to God's revelation. But Q 5:13 comes in the midst of the discussion of how the Children of Israel broke their compact with God. An accusation of "tampering with words from their places" comes immediately before the accusation of forgetting, and the two appear to be in a parallel relationship. An accusation of concealing follows soon afterward (Q 5:15).

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[107] *WKAS*, Band II, Teil 4, 1872.

[108] Lane recorded an occurrence of *nasiyahu* which he understood to mean, "he constrained himself to dismiss it from his mind." *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 8 Supplement, 3033.

This sense of *nasiya* may also be in mind in Q 2:44, where the Children of Israel are questioned, "Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite the book?" The verb seems to have the deliberate active sense of "neglect" in Q 2:238, "Forget not to be bountiful one towards another." Adam also seems to be held responsible for neglecting his covenant with God in Q 20:115, where "he forgot, and we found in him no constancy." Other uses of the verb where forgetting is clearly negative are in 39:11, where a man forgets God and calls upon idols instead; and in Q 2:287, where "if we forget" is identified with the "mistake" in the prayer which ends the *sūra*.

A notable occurrence of *ansā* (Form IV) is Q 2:106, where God causes a verse (*āya*) to be forgotten. The verb comes together with "We abrogate (*nasakha*)," and the two verb forms appear to be connected in a parallel relationship.

The Operation of the Semantic Field

These eight Arabic roots, therefore, comprise the semantic field of tampering in the Qurʾān. Izutsu writes that "Every word has, as it were, its own choice of companions, so much so that the entire vocabulary of a language forms an extremely tangled web of semantic groupings."[109] The survey of verbs above has offered many examples of verbal clusters in which objects help to distinguish the meanings of verbs, and verbs help to identify subjects. Cases of verbal definition of terms from their contexts has been seen to be minimal. However, the verbs of this group frequently appear with synonyms, antonyms, or other verbs set in a parallel relationship. Indeed, in at least five cases discrete verbs of tampering have been noted to appear together in the same verse.

A lack of awareness of this wider semantic grouping of tampering leads to a limited and naïve view of the Qurʾānic material related to the verbs *ḥarrafa* and *baddala*, and thus may cause a scholar to miss a wealth of material in the commentaries relevant to the tampering motif. With this in mind, the descriptions and analyses in chapters 4 and 5 below will include the exegesis of verses containing all eight verbs surveyed above. In addition to verses containing these eight verbs, the net will be flung out still further to include the exegesis of verses

[109] *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, 40.

containing idiomatic expressions. Though some of these additional verses may be neither included in the semantic field nor indicated by scholars of polemic, they contain expressions which can trigger thoughts of tampering in the minds of exegetes.

The chart below sets out the occurrences of the verbs in the semantic field of tampering in Sūras 2–7 of the Qurʾān. Along with these verbs, the occurrences of three idiomatic expressions are noted: "sell for a small price," "write the book with hands," and "throw behind backs." Also provided in the chart are the occurrences of specific names of earlier scriptures, and the expression *muṣaddiq* ("confirming"). The eight verbs are given in italics. Names of earlier scriptures and claims of confirmation appear in capital letters. Included with the verbs are the Qurʾānic subjects and objects, if given.

The chart offers a preview of how the verbs and expressions of the semantic field might be expected to "tangle" in a reading of Sūras 2–7 of the Qurʾān. But a full appreciation of their interactions can only come after a study of the exegesis of these many verses in the commentaries, in which Muqātil and Ṭabarī explain the meanings of the tampering verbs through definition, using yet other verbs, and—most vividly—through the use of narrative. The 25 verses[110] which are the focus of the commentary material described and analysed in detail in chapters 4–7 below are indicated by the numbers in parentheses after the verse references.

[110] One verse which is indicated once in the scholarly lists but not included in the chart below is Q 5:77: "Say, 'People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, other than the truth, and follow not the caprices of a people who went astray before, and led astray many, and now again have gone astray from the right way.'" Because this verse contains neither a reference to an earlier scripture or its confirmation, nor a verb or expression of tampering, it is left aside.

VERSE	TERM	SUBJECT	OBJECT
Q 2:41 (1)	CONFIRMING	what I revealed	what is with you
	sell for small price	Children of Israel (C of I)	signs of God
2:42 (2)	*labasa*	C of I	truth with vanity
	katama	C of I	truth
2:59 (3)	*baddala*	evildoers of C of I	a saying
2:75 (4)	*ḥarrafa*	hearers of God's word	the word of God
2:77 (5)	*asarra*		
2:79 (6)	write with hands		the book (*kitāb*)
	sell for small price		what they have written
2:89	CONFIRMING	a book from God	what is with them
2:91	CONFIRMING	truth	what is with them
2:97	CONFIRMING		what went before
2:101 (7)	CONFIRMING	a messenger from God	what is with them
	throw behind backs	those given the book	the book of God
2:106	*ansā*	God	a verse
2:140 (8)	*katama*	People of the Book (P of B)	testimony from God
2:146 (9)	*katama*	those given the book	truth
2:159 (10)	*katama*		evidence and guidance
2:174 (11)	*katama*		what God sent down
	sell for small price		
2:211 (12)	*baddala*	C of I	the blessings of God
3:3	CONFIRMING	God/the book	what went before it
	TORAH & GOSPEL		
3:48	TORAH & GOSPEL		
3:50	CONFIRMING	Jesus	Torah
	TORAH		
3:65	TORAH & GOSPEL		
3:71 (13)	*labasa*	P of B	truth with vanity
	katama	P of B	truth
3:77	sell for small price		covenant of God
3:78 (14)	*lawā*	a part of P of B	tongues with the book
3:81	CONFIRMING	a messenger	what is with you
3:91	TORAH (x2)		
3:187 (15)	*katama*	those given book	
	throw behind backs	those given book	the book
	sell for small price	those given book	
3:199	sell for small price	P of B	signs of God
4:37 (16)	*katama*		bounties God gave
4:46 (17)	*ḥarrafa*	some of the Jews	words from places
	lawā	some of the Jews	tongues
4:47	CONFIRMING	what we have sent down	what is with you
4:163	PSALMS		

(*cont.*)

VERSE	TERM	SUBJECT	OBJECT
Q 5:13 (18)	*ḥarrafa*	C of I	words from places
	nasiya	C of I	what reminded of
5:14 (19)	*nasiya*	Christians	what reminded of
5:15 (20)	*akhfā*	P of B	much of the book
5:41 (21)	*ḥarrafa*	Jews	words from places
5:43	TORAH		
5:44 (22)	TORAH		
	sell for small price	Jews	signs of God
5:46	CONFIRMING (x2)	God, Jesus	Torah
	TORAH (x2)		
	GOSPEL		
5:47	GOSPEL		
5:48 (23)	CONFIRMING	We/the book in truth	what came before it
5:66	TORAH & GOSPEL		
5:68	TORAH & GOSPEL		
5:110	TORAH & GOSPEL		
6:91 (24)	*akhfā*		much
6:92	CONFIRMING	a book we sent down	what came before it
7:157	TORAH & GOSPEL		
7:162 (25)	*baddala*	evildoers of C of I	a saying

Conclusions

1. Expressions of tampering, specific references to earlier scriptures, and language of confirmation all appear to occur in the same *sūra*s of the Qurʾān. In Sūras 2–7, passages populated with verbs and terms which suggest tampering appear to alternate regularly with contexts thick with occurrences of the words *muṣaddiq*, Tawrāt and Injīl. It was noted in chapter two that the 26 verses connected with the accusation of falsification by scholars of polemic all occur in Sūras 2–7. After an investigation of the semantic field of tampering, it may also be noted that the main verbs and expressions of tampering occur largely in these same *sūra*s. Where these verbs and expressions occur beyond Sūra 7, they have not generally triggered thoughts of tampering with the earlier scriptures in the minds of Muslim exegetes and polemicists.

The Qurʾānic patterns of occurrence of specific names for the earlier scriptures, and of the term *muṣaddiq*, are also striking. 'Torah' and 'Gospel' appear frequently in Sūras 3 and 5, but rarely beyond Sūra 7. Similarly, the language of confirmation is strong in Sūras 2–6, but sparse elsewhere.

2. The subjects and objects of verbs and expressions of tampering are generally vague and ambiguous. They may be suggestive, or allusive, as influenced by reader or context, but they are seldom specific. The objects of tampering verbs are most often indistinct expressions like "truth," "words," "signs" or "testimony." The closest which a verse containing the alteration verbs *ḥarrafa* or *baddala* comes to suggesting one of the earlier revelations is "the word of God" at Q 2:75. An actual name of one of the earlier scriptures never appears as the object of a verb of tampering. Furthermore, neither the word *kitāb* nor any other term for a written document appears as the object of an alteration verb.

Verbs of concealing, however, may indicate a writing as object. In Q 2:174 the object of *katama* is "what God sent down of the *kitāb*"; and in Q 5:15 the object of *akhfā* is "much of the *kitāb*." The term *kitāb* also appears in two other *katama* verses, though not as object (Q 2:146 and 2:159); and the expression "the book which Moses brought" appears near *akhfā* in Q 6:91.

Also noteworthy is the occurrence of *kitāb* in two verses frequently indicated by scholars of polemic, Q 2:79 and 3:78. At Q 2:79 the action concerns 'writing the book with hands' and selling what those hands

have written. At Q 3:78 the action in focus is 'twisting tongues with the book.'

3. These observations on the occurrences of verbs, terms and expressions in Sūras 2–7 set up a series of expectations for the exegesis of the tampering verses in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. One possible expectation is that exegetes who want to demonstrate coherence of meanings within Muslim scripture will need to consider how they can explain the verses of tampering in such a way that their explanations harmonize with the Qurʾānic characterizations of the earlier scriptures. If a contradiction of meaning exists among tampering verses, positive characterizations of earlier scriptures, and claims of a relationship of confirmation in the Qurʾān, it remains unresolved in Muslim scripture. This apparent tension heightens the anticipation of how the exegetes will understand the interaction of these elements.

Another expectation for the exegesis of the tampering verses is that because of the ambiguity of the subjects and objects of the tampering verbs, Muqātil and Ṭabarī will be free to pursue a variety of exegetical options. Perhaps they will provide the reader with a single interpretation. Perhaps they will simply map out the options and leave it to the reader to decide. The understanding of these verses in the commentaries themselves during the formative period of *tafsīr* will now be explored.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUQĀTIL IBN SULAYMĀN ON THE QURʾĀNIC VERSES OF TAMPERING

Muslim commentators considered the words and expressions of the Qurʾān and developed meanings from them in major—and sometimes massive—works of exegesis. This chapter and the following chapters present the exegesis of the Qurʾānic verses of tampering by Muqātil and Ṭabarī. The methodology pursued in this presentation is literary analysis, involving close observation and careful description of the texts themselves.

These two chapters describe what the two exegetes offer in their explanations of some 25 verses which have been associated with the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures. The material in the commentaries which clearly relates to the tampering theme is examined in greatest detail. In many cases the original Arabic words are given so that the nuances of the exegetes' development of the tampering motif can be subsequently pursued. In the descriptions of Muqātil's exegesis of the tampering verses, some straightforward observations are offered about the context of the verse in the Qurʾān. If the individual verse is part of a so-called "homily of rebuke,"[1] then the larger scriptural text unit promises to illuminate the meaning of the verse itself. Following this up, descriptions of commentary passages in chapters 4 and 5 frequently include observations about the contexts of the passages in the commentaries. These are given in the understanding that what the exegete writes immediately before and after exerts an influence on his interpretation of the tampering verse in question.

Each chapter begins with an introduction to the method by which the exegete explains the text of the Qurʾān. These introductions integrate personal research with scholarly perspectives. Footnotes throughout the chapters provide relevant information given neither in the scriptural locution nor the commentary passage at

[1] A term used by Julian Obermann in "Koran and Agada," 23.

hand. This includes information from other parts of the Qurʾān or the commentary; from the early Muslim commentaries of al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) and ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827); from other genres which include similar narrative material such as *Sīra*, *Ḥadīth* or *Asbāb al-nuzūl*; and from scholarly studies on the Qurʾān or its exegesis. The first part of this chapter offers thick description of Muqātil's explanations in order to facilitate analysis later in the chapter. In chapter 6 the narrative elements in the descriptions will be further scrutinized for their relationship to larger narrative structures.

Muqātil's Style of Exegesis

Kees Versteegh describes Muqātil's commentary as "by far the most independent and interesting of the early commentaries."[2] The *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* presents the complete text of the Qurʾān in its canonical arrangement, broken into fragments of verses and interspersed with commentary. Pieces of scriptural text relate to explanation through a series of connectives or frequently through absence of a connective. The connective *yaʿnī* appears most often; *yaqūl* also appears, as well as (less frequently) *ay*. Muqātil provides glosses for a great number of Qurʾānic words. Some words he consistently glosses in the same way, such as *ṣaddaqa* for *āmana*.[3] He will sometimes also give a second gloss for his own gloss. The glosses provide lexical explanations for words which the exegete evidently either does not like or thinks the reader will not understand.[4]

Occurrences of the name of Muḥammad, *nabī* or *rasūl* are followed in the commentary by the phrase "God bless him and grant him salvation." The expression "upon whom be peace" is generally attached to the names of lesser prophets. After the name God, or references to

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[2] Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 130. Regula Forster remarks that the fluency of Muqātil's commentary comes from the fact that he did not yet need to discuss alternative interpretations, and thus could simply give his own explanations. "Methoden arabischer Qurʾānexegese," 397.

[3] John Wansbrough gives some examples of these "minimal units of explication" in *Quranic Studies*, 129; and Versteegh provides a fuller list in "Grammar and Exegesis," 211–212.

[4] Versteegh suggests that Muqātil "corrects" the scriptural text freely, evidently replacing expressions with his own "without any qualms." "Grammar and Exegesis," 214.

the divinity, one usually finds *subḥānuhu* ('praise him'), *ʿazza wa jalla* ('powerful and exalted') or *taʿāla* ('the sublime').

A striking feature of the commentary is the frequency with which Muqātil provides proper names for the unidentified pronouns of scripture, as well as for such generic terms as "believers." In his shorter explanations, he gives paraphrases for scriptural clauses and offers extra information where the reader may be curious to know missing details. A large proportion of his longer explanations is narrative material. The formula *wa dhālika an/anna* usually introduces a narrative which is offered as the occasion of the verse's recitation. Muqātil often signals a return to the canonical text with *fa-qāla subḥānahu*. Another expression, *nazalat fī*, commonly indicates the person(s) about whom the exegete believes God revealed the verse.

Muqātil's commentary is missing a number of elements which are familiar from commentaries of later periods. When he wants to explain the meanings of scriptural words, he does not refer to the use of these words in pre-Islamic poetry or *ḥadīth*. Rather, he limits his comparative material to scriptural *shawāhid*, introducing cross-references by the expressions *naẓīruha* ('comparable to that'), *mithla qawlihi taʿālā* ('resembling God's saying') and *ka-mā qāla* ('like what he said'). A fine example of reference to other parts of the Qurʾān comes in the extended explanatory section following Q 2:1–5, where quotations from Q 3:1–7 are used to support not only Muqātil's interpretation of Q 2:1–5, but also the narratives and identifications which he himself has supplied. Muqātil sometimes takes time to gloss or explain his cross references as well.

Two other elements virtually missing from the commentary are *variae lectiones* and alternative glosses. Muqātil does not explain grammatical or stylistic phenomena. He does not provide *isnād*s,[5] a lack for which he was greatly criticized by later scholars. He was apparently not interested in doctrines such as *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*,[6] or the claim that there are no foreign words in the Qurʾān. Claude Gilliot demonstrated that Muqātil's remarks on a number of Hebrew figures represent a

[5] A couple of these appear at Q 2:32 and 4:48, though they seem out of place and their function is not clear. For discussion of *isnād*s in the published commentary, see Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, 522–523; Gilliot, "Muqatil, grand exegete," 41f.; and Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 143, cf. 178–183.

[6] One case in point is his exegesis of Q 2:23–24, his first good opportunity to present the doctrine. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 93–94.

period prior to the development of the doctrine of the sinlessness of prophets.[7] The exegete's discussion of the thoughts of Joseph at Q 12:24, the behavior of David with Bathsheba, and the story of Solomon and the statue, for example, show a freedom of interpretation which was not open to Muslim scholars of a later period.[8] Muqātil seems to take anthropomorphic and deterministic passages at face value,[9] again a tendency for which he was taken to task by others. Gilliot remarks, "The criticism leveled at Muqātil actually betrays a discernible historical trend of backward projection, whereby ancient scholars come to be judged according to standards which only find widespread acceptance long after the scholar in question has died."[10] On the other hand, Muqātil's comments about the abrogation of verses are familiar from later standard commentaries.[11]

The style of the commentary is what Wansbrough described as "unhurried, almost chatty."[12] Indeed, the reader detects no anxiety about exegetical "problems." Versteegh suggests that Muqātil "takes it for granted that the text [of the Qurʾān] with a few glosses and with a lot of historical explanations is perfectly clear to the believers."[13]

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[7] "Muqātil, grand exégète," 70, 84.

[8] Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 70–72. Not only did Muqātil openly discuss the stories of these earlier figures, but he also commented freely on well-known stories from the life of the prophet of Islam (at Q 33:36–38, 33:50–52, and 53:24). Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 72–78. The exegete even went so far as to compare the circumstances of David and Bathsheba with those of Muḥammad and Zaynab. Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 74–75. This raises the question as to whether the objection to Muqātil and his commentary among medieval Muslim scholars was actually due to anthropomorphism and lack of *isnād*. In a personal interview in Nijmegen on February 6, 2003, Dr. Kees Versteegh suggested that Muqātil's discussions of sexual behaviour have posed a problem for more recent Islamic authorities in Cairo.

[9] Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 215. Versteegh writes that there is no trace of Muqātil either emphasizing or de-emphasizing scriptural passages touching on these themes. Wesley Williams suggests that Muqātil's anthropomorphism was not significantly different from that of Ibn Ḥanbal, who appreciated Muqātil's knowledge of the Qurʾān. "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal: A study of anthropomorphism in early Islamic discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002), 454. Further on Muqātil's anthropomorphism, see Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 28; Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète," 83; and Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qurʾān in the Theology of al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm*: Kitāb al-Mustarshid (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 4–5.

[10] "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval," 106–107.

[11] Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 214. A good example in the passages of this study comes at the end of Q 5:13. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462.

[12] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 133.

[13] Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 214. Actually, 'narrative explanations' would be a better description of what Muqātil offers than 'historical explanations.'

The *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* is a commentary which tells the text of the Qurʾān as one continuous story. The reader senses an intention on the part of the exegete to provide a narrative framework for scripture passages which contain no explanatory context. The importance of the *narratio* in Muqātil's commentary has been noted by Wansbrough.[14] Narrative takes the central place as the generator of meaning, and indeed seems to dominate the scriptural text itself.[15] The effect of this narrative style of exegesis is to give continuity and wholeness to the text of the Qurʾān. Muqātil attempts this through a number of indentifiable devices.

First of all, the use of connectives—as well as the absence of connectives—between scriptural text and commentary tends to smooth out the verses which do not seem to be linked by any explicit narrative flow. Muqātil repeats scriptural units given earlier in order to keep text and commentary moving forward together. Just prior to a verse, he will often introduce the object which the verse is about to describe.[16] He will often anticipate scriptural material yet to come, and sometimes will tell the story in advance of the scriptural reference (as if he is impatient to narrate?).[17] In order to fill in narrative details of the version of a prophetic story at hand, he freely ransacks versions of the story in other parts of the Qurʾān by means of cross-reference. All of these devices have the effect of binding the present verse or narrative to what comes before and after in the text.

Muqātil's style of writing also has the texture of story-telling. He often seems to paraphrase scriptural clauses in the mood of "in other words...." His double-glossing and "supercommentary"[18] bring to mind a conversation between exegete and audience. His identification

[14] *Quranic Studies*, 140, 127.

[15] Rippin, "Tafsīr," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 238.

[16] termed by Wansbrough "stage directions," *Quranic Studies*, 124. An early example is when Muqātil introduces Q 2:4 with, "Then he mentioned the believers of the people of the Torah, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions...." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.

[17] A striking example of Muqātil telling the story before the verses is at Q 2:51–55. He first provides long narratives about the Children of Israel "taking the calf" and about the 70 leaders demanding to see God, and then gives the entire scriptural passage Q 2:54–56 all at once. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 104–108.

[18] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 129.

of anonymous references,[19] known as *taʿyīn al-mubham*,[20] creates familiarity with the text and enhances the quality of the narrative.[21] He sets up a system of representative characters who appear repeatedly throughout the narrative to bring the vague scriptural references back to the story. He elaborates as fully as possible the Qurʾān's own narrative indications, and at times seems to provide extra information simply to entertain the curious reader.[22]

In the following description of Muqātil's exegesis, reference is also made to the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) for clarifications on wordings. Ibn Isḥāq wrote at about the same time as Muqātil, and his *Sīra* shows many similarities to Muqātil's *Tafsīr*.[23] While Muqātil presents the verses of the Qurʾān in canonical sequence and provides a narrative structure so that the verses flow smoothly like a story, Ibn Isḥāq tells a story in chronological sequence and provides verses so that the

[19] As Versteegh expresses it, "Nothing and nobody is left anonymous." "Grammar and exegesis," 214. Versteegh gives the "absurd" example of Muqātil's naming the ant who talked to Sulaymān ʿal-Jarmīʾ (at Q 27:18, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. III, 299). Roberto Tottoli gives another good example of this kind of identification from Muqātil's exegesis of Q 37:102–7 (*Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. III, 615). Not only does Muqātil confidently identify Abraham's son of intended sacrifice to be Isaac, but he also informs the reader that the ram sacrificed in Isaac's place was named *Razīn*—"one of the billy-goats that had been grazing in paradise for 40 years prior to the sacrifice"! *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002), 99.

[20] "Literally, the identification of what God deliberately left unidentified." Burton, "Law and exegesis," 270.

[21] "In the Muslim haggadah the exegetical device known as *taʿyīn al-mubham* (identification of the vague and ambiguous) served to establish a connection between scriptural phraseology and external referent, in the interest of narrative continuity." Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 7.

[22] Other recent translations from and descriptions of Muqātil's commentary include Regula Forster, *Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qurʾānexegese*, 11–19; Leigh N.B. Chipman, "Adam and the Angels: An examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources," *Arabica* XLIX (2002), 434, 435, 448 (on Q 2:30 & 33); and Andrew Rippin's translations of Muqātil on Sūra 1 in *Windows on the House of Islam*, John Renard, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 29–31; and Sūra 98 in *Classical Islam: A sourcebook of religious literature*, ed. and trans., Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi and Andrew Rippin (London: Routledge, 2003), 105–107. Nicolai Sinai also provides both numerous translations and important description of Muqātil's exegetical method in *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, chapters 8–12.

[23] Wansbrough went so far as to write, "the structural similarity between the works of Ibn Isḥāq and Muqātil seems to me almost beyond dispute, and if the terms *sīra* and *tafsīr* later became designations of distinct literary genres, their basic identity for the earlier period may, I think, be conceded." *Quranic Studies*, 127. Cf. Wim Raven, "Sīra and the Qurʾān," *EQ* (2006), Vol. 5, 36. Their similarity in relation to the tampering theme will be explored in chapter 7.

story reads like salvation history. Because of these similarities, a comparison of their wordings for the purposes of description and analysis promises to provide added perspective.[24]

Muqātil's Commentary on Verses Containing Verbs of Alteration

As noted in chapter two, scholarly lists of Qurʾānic verses associated with the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of earlier scriptures most frequently indicate the four verses containing the verb *ḥarrafa*. For some, there is an even more compelling basis for their importance. Abdullah Saeed writes, "Of the terms related to 'distortion' and 'corruption' of the text used in the Qurʾān, the popular Muslim view takes the derivatives of the term *taḥrīf* as the basis of its insistence on the deliberate falsification of Tawrāt and Injīl by Jews and Christians, respectively."[25] For this reason, the *ḥarrafa* verses are examined in the greatest detail below. Three verses containing a second verb of alteration, *baddala*, are also examined. Other Arabic verbs of change, such as *ghayyara* and *ḥawwala*, do not appear in the Qurʾān in contexts which have been understood to suggest tampering with the earlier scriptures.

Q 2:58, 59

> And when we said, "Enter this township, and eat easefully of it wherever you will, and enter in at the gate, prostrating, and say, *ḥiṭṭatun*; We will forgive you your transgressions, and increase the good-doers." Then the evildoers substituted (*baddala*) a saying other than that which had been said to them; so we sent down upon the evildoers wrath out of heaven for their ungodliness.[26]

The first verse containing a verb of alteration to appear in the canonical progression of the Qurʾān is Q 2:59. This verse comes in the middle of a long section of scriptural narrative about the Children of Israel (Q 2:49–74). The verb of alteration in Q 2:59 is *baddala*, described in

[24] The edition of Ibn Ishāq referenced here is *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Hamīd, ed. (Cairo: Maktaba Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣabīh wa Awlād, 1963), four volumes.

[25] "The Charge of Distortion," 420.

[26] English translations of the featured Qurʾānic verses are indebted to Arberry, and occasionally to Pickthall. However, translations sometimes reflect literal renderings of the Arabic text or the evident understandings of the exegete.

chapter 3. Muqātil explains this verse by telling a story about Banū Isrāʾīl from the distant past, when that community was led by Yūshuʿa ibn Nūn.[27] He tells the story, in fact, before giving the scriptural words of Q 2:59. The action of alteration which Muqātil understands here is a verbal substitution or replacement of one expression with another.

When Banū Isrāʾīl were about to enter through the gate of a town called "Īlyāʾ" (Jerusalem was known as 'Aelia Capitolina' by the Romans), recounts Muqātil, God commanded them to say the expression "*ḥiṭṭatun*" at the moment of entering. In the event, the good-doers voiced the expression which they had been commanded to say. Others, however, said "*haṭā saqamāthā*," which Muqātil interprets to mean "red wheat (*ḥinṭa hamrāʾ*)."[28] The exegete also explains the manner in which this was said: "They said that mocking (*istihzāʾ*) and altering (*tabdīl*) what they had been commanded."[29]

Along with the verbal alteration of an expression came a substitution of posture as well. God had commanded Banū Isrāʾīl to enter the town prostrate, which Muqātil pictures as "bending upon one side of their faces."[30] The disobedient people, however, entered the gate lying down.

Q 2:75

> Are you (pl.) then so eager that they should believe you (pl.), seeing there is a party of them that heard the word of God, then tampered with (*yuḥarrifūna*) it, and that after they had understood it, knowingly?

The verse with the first occurrence of *ḥarrafa* comes at the start of a unit of verses about the responses of the People of the Book. Preceding

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[27] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 109–110.

[28] Uri Rubin writes on Muqātil's phrase that *sumqātā* means 'red' in Aramaic. *Between Bible and* Qurʾān*: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 1999), 85–86. Scholars have tried to understand the scriptural expression *ḥiṭṭa* and to explain what Muslim exegetes have identified as the substituted expression. Goldziher suggested that *ḥiṭṭa* may be derived from the Hebrew *ḥataʾnu*, "we have sinned." Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 227–8. Wansbrough, following the lead of Hirschfeld and Speyer, noted the suggestion of the alteration of *chaṭaʾah* (sin) into *chaṭah* (wheat). *Quranic Studies*, 189. Other interesting discussions on *ḥiṭṭa* include: James A. Bellamy, "Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 13 (1993), 566–7; and Bell, "Muhammad's Knowledge," 11.

[29] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 110.

[30] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 109.

Q 2:75 is a long section of narrative about Moses and the Children of Israel which begins at Q 2:49. The passage Q 2:75–79 contains another tampering verb, *asarra* at Q 2:77, plus an important expression of tampering, "write the book with hands," at Q 2:79. Muqātil's interpretation of both of these verses will be given in separate sections below.

Muqātil's exegesis of Q 2:75[31] centers on an extended narrative about Moses and seventy leaders whom he had appointed. He offers the story after giving in segments the first part of the verse: "Are you then so eager that they should believe you seeing there is a party of them that heard the word of God. . . ." The exegete then passes from scriptural text to narrative through the expression *wa dhālika anna*. This phrase functions roughly in the same way as the English introductory phrase, "This is about how. . . ."[32] In Muqātil's story, the seventy leaders (*al-sabʿūn*) had demanded from Moses that he show them God publicly.[33] But instead of revealing himself to the seventy, God had killed them as a punishment for their request. Now God revives the seventy,[34] and this time they say, "We know now that you do not see your Lord, but rather you hear his voice. So let us hear his voice."[35] Moses is skeptical about the request,[36] but he goes ahead and prays, "Oh Lord, truly these your servants Banū Isrāʾīl want to hear your word (*kalām*)." God responds by giving a list of requirements for anyone who wanted to hear his word. The requirements are to isolate oneself from women for three days, to wash oneself thoroughly on the third day, to then clothe oneself with new clothes, and finally to approach the mountain. "Then I will make them hear my word (*kalāmī*),"[37] promises God.

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31 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 116–117.

32 Other possible renderings are "this happened because…," or "for the matter was."

33 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 116. Mention of the 70 whom Moses chose comes in the Qurʾān at Q 7:155.

34 Elements of the narrative to this point are given within the Qurʾān itself. Prior to Q 2:75, the Children of Israel tell Moses, "'we will not believe thee till we see God openly'; and the thunderbolt took you while you were beholding. Then we raised you up after you were dead, that haply you should be thankful" (Q 2:55). Also at Q 4:153, "The People of the Book will ask thee to bring down upon them a Book from heaven; and they asked Moses for greater than that, for they said, 'Show us God openly.' And the thunderbolt took them for their evildoing." The phrase "they said, 'Show us God openly,'" is identical in Muqātil's narrative here and at Q 4:153.

35 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 116.

36 He said, *a mā hādha fa-ʿasā*, "Is this possible?" *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 116.

37 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 116.

The seventy men comply with God's requirements, then proceed with Moses to the mountain. Moses tells the men that they will see a cloud cover the mountain, and that they will see a fire within the cloud. They will also hear a voice. "So prostrate yourselves before your Lord," Moses instructs the seventy, "and see what he will command you, then do it." The seventy reply that they will do so. Moses then climbs the mountain and is hidden from the men by a cloud. They see a light in the cloud and hear a voice coming out of the cloud like the sound of a trumpet. They lie down prostrate. God says, "I am your Lord, there is no god except me, the living, the eternal—I who brought you out of the land of Egypt by an exalted hand and powerful arm. Do not worship a god other than me, do not associate anything with me, and do not make an image of me. You will not see me, but you will hear my word (*kalāmī*)."[38]

However, as soon as the seventy hear the word (*kalām*) of God, writes Muqātil, they all fall unconscious from terror. And when they regain consciousness, they find themselves lying prostrate. So they say to Moses, "We were not able to hear the word (*kalām*) of our Lord. You stand between us and our Lord so that he will speak with you, and then you tell us." Moses prays once more, telling God that Banū Isrāʾīl were not able to hear his word (*kalām*), and asking him to speak again. God agrees to Moses' request and begins to give commandments to his prophet. Moses then tells the seventy, who affirm, "We have heard our Lord and we obey (*aṭāʿa*)." The commandments and prohibitions of God come to an end, the cloud ascends and the voice departs.[39] The seventy raise their heads and return to their community. There the people ask the seventy, "What did your Lord command you and prohibit you?"[40]

In answer to this question of the common people, writes Muqātil, some of the seventy report truthfully what they heard. Others from among the seventy report what they heard, but then add an extra clause at the end of God's saying. "If you are not able to give up what he has forbidden you," they advise, "then just do what you are able."[41]

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[38] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 117.

[39] Paul Nwyia provided a French translation of Muqātil's story up to this point, and suggested that it was one of the oldest Muslim descriptions of a religious experience of God. *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 84–85.

[40] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 117.

[41] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 117. The *Sīra* narrative related to Q 2:75 is much shorter than that given by Muqātil, but similar in outline. The ending of that narrative, how-

The exegete now shifts from the story back to the words of the verse through the expression *fa-dhālika qawluhu* ('so that is [God's] saying'). He repeats the parts of the verse which he has already given, slipping in a piece of gloss between them which he'd forgotten earlier, then immediately introduces the next part of the verse, "then tampered with it, and that after they had comprehended it." Muqātil gives no further comment on the verb *ḥarrafa*.

Q 2:211

> Ask the Children of Israel how many a clear sign we gave them. Whoso changes (*yubaddil*) God's blessing after it has come to him, God is terrible in retribution.

Muqātil recounts the many clear signs given to the Children of Israel with a formulaic list: "We parted the sea for them and destroyed their enemies and sent down on them manna and quails and the cloud and the rock."[42] But the Jews of Madīna did not respond to God in a way which was appropriate to these many signs given to their forefathers, writes Muqātil. "They disbelieved (*kafara*) in the Lord of these blessings when they disbelieved in Muḥammad."[43] The exegete then links this action of unbelief with the scriptural phrase "whoso changes God's blessing after it has come to him" with one of his characteristic connectors, "so that is his saying, praise him."[44] Muqātil thus understands the verse to mean an action of unbelief in Muḥammad by the Jews living in Madīna during the rule of the prophet of Islam in that city.

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ever provides a significant variant: "Then [Moses] went back with them to the Children of Israel and when he came to them a party of them changed (*ḥarrafa*) what they had been commanded; and when Moses said to the Children of Israel, 'God has ordered you to do so-and-so,' they…contradicted (*khilāf*) what God had said to them." Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 379. Muqātil's narrative may also be profitably compared with the story in the Torah where Yahweh asks Moses to choose "70 of Israel's elders," at Numbers 11:16–30. There their function is to aid Moses in leading the Israelites in the wilderness. Yahweh promises to "come down" and speak with Moses. In the event there is also mention of "the cloud." Yahweh takes the spirit that was on Moses and puts it on the 70 elders. There is also mention of 'consecration' in this story, but the command is to the general population of Israelites in preparation for eating the meat which God will provide for them.

[42] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 180.

[43] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 180.

[44] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 180. *fa-dhālika qawlahu subḥānahu.*

Q 4:46

> Some of the Jews tamper with (*yuḥarrifūna*) words from their places[45] saying, "We have heard and we disobey" and "Hear, may you (sing.) not hear" and "*rāʿinā*," twisting with their tongues and defaming religion. If they had said, "We have heard and obey" and "Hear" and "Regard us," it would have been better for them, and more upright; but God has cursed them for their unbelief, so they believe not except a few.

Q 4:46 is one verse in a unit of verses which begins rather abruptly at 4:44 with a question, "Have you not regarded those who were given a share of the book?" Prior to Q 4:44 is an extended section of legal material which is addressed to the "believers."[46] Surrounding Q 4:46 in near proximity are possible expressions of tampering ("purchase error" at Q 4:44, and "invent a falsehood against God" at 4:50), plus a claim of the confirmation of earlier scriptures at Q 4:47.

Muqātil's exegesis of Q 4:46[47] consists largely of short segments of the verse followed by short phrases of explanation, some as brief as a single word. There is no extended narration in the commentary on this verse, even though the verse seems to indicate speeches from the Jews to an unspecified listener.

The Jews "tamper with the words out of their places." This same phrase, *yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihi*, appears at Q 5:13 and 5:41.[48] In this first explanation of the phrase, Muqātil writes that the Jews do this action "through tampering (*taḥrīf*)." *Taḥrīf*, verbal noun of *ḥarrafa*, does not appear in the Qurʾān, but became the technical term for tampering in Muslim tradition. The "words," writes Muqātil, mean the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad. He further explains "out of their places" as "out of its declaration (*bayān*) in the Torah." And he finally qualifies the action in view as "twisting with their tongues,"[49] a phrase which appears later in the verse.

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[45] Literal translation of *al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihi*.

[46] Iṣlāḥī makes a division between Q 4:43 and 4:44 on similar grounds. A.H. Mathias Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: al-Baqara and al-Nisāʾ," in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qurʾān* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 28, 39.

[47] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 376–377.

[48] At Q 5:41 the phrase is slightly different, with *min baʿd* in place of *ʿan*. W.M. Watt gives a list of the many ways this phrase has been rendered in English in *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 31.

[49] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 376.

Following this longer explanation of the *ḥarrafa* phrase, Muqātil intersperses segments of the speech of the Jews with commentary in the following manner:

> "We have heard" / your saying / "and we disobey (*ʿaṣā*),"[50] / your command so we do not obey (*ṭāʿa*) / and "Hear," / us O Muḥammad, we tell you / "may you not hear"[51] / from you your saying O Muḥammad. [It is] unacceptable what you say / "*rāʿinā*" / meaning observe us, we hear you.[52]

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[50] Watt suggests that the action here concerns bilingual wordplay: "*shāmaʿnū we-ʿāsīnū* and *samiʿnā wa-ʿaṣaynā*, meaning respectively 'we hear and do' and 'we hear and disobey." The Jews "seem to say the Hebrew *ʿāsīnū*, but their actions show that they have in fact said the Arabic *ʿaṣaynā*." "The Early Development," 52. Richard Bell agrees, and locates the Hebrew phrase in Deuteronomy 5:27. From this, Bell conjectures that Muḥammad had actually heard this phrase and the *shemaʿ* in a synagogue service. "Muhammad's Knowledge," 14. Alfred Guillaume suggests another possibility: "when they said 'we hear' and *ʿaṣaynā* they were playing on the similar-sounding Hebrew word *asīnu* (with *sīn*) meaning 'we carry out.'" *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's* Sīrat Rasūl Allāh (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 264, n. 1. See also Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 41f., for discussion of the assumption of "mishearing" and the possible Hebrew words involved.

[51] On this phrase see Arne A. Ambros, "'Höre, ohne zu hören' zu Koran 4, 46(48)," *ZDMG* 136 (1986), 15–22.

[52] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 376. The enigmatic scriptural word '*rāʿinā*' has drawn many explanations from Muslim exegetes and western scholars alike. Muqātil discussed the term at its first occurrence in the Qurʾān, at Q 2:104. On "O believers, do not say, 'Observe us,'" he writes, "This is about how the believers said to the prophet (PBUH), '*rāʿinā samʿaka*,' like their saying amongst themselves in the time of ignorance. *Rāʿinā* in the speech of the Jews is a term of abuse (*shatm*). When the Jews heard the associators saying that, it amazed them. So they said something similar to the prophet (PBUH). A man from the helpers—Saʿd ibn ʿIbādat al-Anṣārī by name—said to the Jews, 'a man from you said it to the prophet' (PBUH), to Aḍar ibn ʿAnqahu. So God, powerful and exalted, admonished the believers, saying, 'O believers, do not say'—to the prophet (PBUH)—'*rāʿinā*.'" *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 128–129. Dawid Künstlinger identified *rāʿinā* as the imperative of Form II *raʿā*, and compared it to the Hebrew imperative *rʿenū* of the Jewish table prayer. Jews and Christians have addressed God in this way in prayer. But Muḥammad could not allow the expressions "watch us" or "Our Shepherd," because in the Arab view to call God "Shepherd" would be blasphemy. Muḥammad will have heard this prayer of the Jews and Christians, wrote Künstlinger, and forbade its use. "Rāʿinā," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies London Institution* 5 (1930): 881. Watt wrote that the Qurʾān seems to want to stop the Jews from saying *rāʿinā* because it resembles the Hebrew root for "evil" (*raʿ*). He added that this "looks like a piece of Jewish mockery of Muḥammad." "The Early Development," 52. Andrew Rippin, in his discussion of *asbāb* reports on this term, similarly suggested that the "inter-lingual play" is between Arabic *raʾā* and Hebrew *raʿ*. "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qurʾānic exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* LI (1988), 17–18. More recently, Frederick Denny wrote that *rāʿinā* is "an insulting corruption of an Arabic phrase, '*rāʾinā*,' meaning 'Please listen to us.'" "Corruption," 440. Further explanations can be found in Jeffery, "The Qurʾān as Scripture," 260, n. 4; and Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 45–46.

Muqātil's explanation of the next phrase, "Twisting (*layyan*) with their tongues and slandering (*ṭaʿnan*) religion," will be explained separately below. Here it may simply be noted that from these words he understands disrespect toward Muḥammad and Islam. The exegete then explains the speech which the Jews should have given in much the same way in which he explained the speech they gave.[53]

At the end of his commentary on Q 4:46, the exegete explains that the object of God's curse is Jewish unbelievers: "Though they know that God is their Lord, and that he is their creator and their sustainer, they disbelieve in Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him salvation,[54] and in what he brought. This was revealed about Rifāʿa ibn Zayd ibn al-Sāʾib and Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf and Kaʿb ibn Asad, all of them Jews."[55]

Q 5:13

> So for their breaking their compact we cursed them and made their hearts hard. They are tampering with (*yuḥarrifūna*) words from their places; and they have forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of; and you (sing.) will never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them. Yet pardon them, and forgive; surely God loves the good-doers.

Q 5:13 is part of a unit of verses concerned with the People of the Book. The first impression is that this unit begins abruptly at Q 5:12 after a section of legal material addressed to "believers." Suddenly there is a shift from second person to third person with, "God made a covenant with the Children of Israel." This impression, however, apparently does not occur to Muqātil, because he understands Q 5:11 to refer to a major incident of Jewish treachery, and this story subsequently influences his interpretation of Q 5:13.[56] The following verses also contain references to two verbs in the wider semantic field of tampering at Q 5:14 (*nasiya*) and 5:15 (*akhfā*).

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[53] On the appearance of the phrase, "We hear and we obey" at Q 5:7, 24:51 and 2:285, see Julian Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 31–34.

[54] *ṣallā ʾllāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*. Subsequent occurrences of this expression will be indicated by "(PBUH)".

[55] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 377.

[56] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 458–460. Ibn Isḥāq also finds Q 5:11 to relate to a story of treachery. *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 403.

Muqātil's exegesis of Q 5:13[57] continues the progression from his commentary on the preceding verse, 5:12. In explaining Q 5:13 itself, the exegete provides glosses for a number of the phrases, as well as completion of open-ended expressions. In addition to containing the third occurrence of the verb *ḥarrafa*, Q 5:13 contains another verb from the semantic field of tampering, *nasiya*, which will be dealt with separately below. The commentary also includes an interesting example of the application of the *naskh* principle.

The exegete begins by identifying the "curse" of the verse's first phrase with "transformation" (*maskh*). He further completes the scriptural phrase "and made their hearts hard," by adding, "against faith in Muḥammad."

On "tampering with words out of their places"—the phrase that first appeared at Q 4:46—Muqātil offers no new information about the verb *ḥarrafa*. But he writes, as he did in his exegesis of Q 4:46, that "the words (*kalim*) are the description (*ṣifa*) of Muḥammad." Immediately following this he offers a longer explanation of the tampering action he understands from the verse. On "they have forgotten (*nasiya*) a portion of what they were reminded of," Muqātil writes:

> This is about how God, powerful and exalted, made a covenant with Banū Isrā᾿īl in the Torah that they would believe (*āmana*) in Muḥammad (PBUH), and give credence (*ṣaddaqa*) to him. He is written [in what is] with them in the Torah.[58] Then when God, powerful and exalted, sent him, they disbelieved (*kafara*) in him and envied (*ḥasada*) him, and said, "This one is not from the descendents of Isḥāq, but rather he is from the descendents of Ismāʿīl."[59]

In this passage, the exegete introduces into the discussion of tampering two significant considerations. One is the claim that the command to respond appropriately to the prophet of Islam is part of the covenant which the Children of Israel made with God. The second is that the motivation of envy, awakened in the Children of Israel when they saw that Muḥammad was not of their own kind, led them to reject him.

As for the "act of treachery (*khā᾿ina*)" which the Children of Israel can be expected to do, the exegete identifies it as faithlessness (*al-ghishsh*)

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[57] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461–462.

[58] *huwa maktūbun ʿindahum fī ᾿l-tawrāt*. The wording for the scriptural phrase, "written down with them in the Torah and Gospel" (Q 7:157), is *maktūban ʿindahum fī ᾿l-tawrāt wa ᾿l-injīl*.

[59] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461.

towards the prophet.[60] The "few" who do not engage in treachery, according to Muqātil, are ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions,[61] who are believers.

For this unbelieving and treacherous behaviour of most of the Children of Israel the Qurʾān prescribes tolerance: "Yet pardon them, and forgive." But here Muqātil states that this divine ruling is only in force "until God brings his command in the matter of Banū Qurayẓa and Naḍīr, and the command of God concerning them was killing, and captivity, and expulsion."[62] The second command did indeed come, continues Muqātil, and as a result "the forgiveness and pardon became abrogated (*mansūkh*); the sword verse[63] in Baraʾa abrogated it. And when that command came, God Almighty killed them and captured them and expelled them."[64]

Q 5:41

> O messenger, let them not grieve you (sing.) that vie with one another in unbelief, such men as say with their mouths, "we believe" but their hearts believe not; and the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to you (sing.), tampering with (*yuḥarrifūna*) words from their places, saying, "If you (pl.) are given this, then take it; if you (pl.) are not given it, beware!" Whomsoever God desires to try, you cannot avail him anything with God. Those are they whose hearts God desired not to purify; for them is degradation in this world; and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement.

Muqātil gives a comparatively large amount of space to his exegesis of Q 5:41.[65] His commentary on the verse consists of 14 scriptural pieces

[60] ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī (d. 211/827) further qualifies the situation referred to in "you will always catch some of them committing some act of treachery" (Q 5:13). He characterizes the action as faithlessness (*khiyāna*), lying (*kadhib*) and immorality (*fujūr*). *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz, Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1991), Vol. I, 183.

[61] In Muslim tradition, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām was a convert to Islam from the Jewish community in Madīna. J. Horowitz, "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām," *EI2* (1960), Vol. 1, 52. Further sources on this figure are H. Hirschfeld, "Historical and Legendary Controversies between Mohammed and the Rabbis" *Jewish Quarterly Review* x (1897), 109–116; and Stephen M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 175–178.

[62] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462.

[63] Q 9:5: "Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way; God is forgiving, merciful."

[64] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462.

[65] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 474–478.

interspersed with his explanations. He offers gloss, attribution, identification of vague references, and completion of open-ended phrases. Typical is the tendency to gives names to the unnamed, even the need-not-be named, such as two adulterers, assorted Jewish scholars, and the people among whom the adulterers are eventually stoned. But most remarkable about his exegesis of this verse is the large narrative section he offers, three full pages in the commentary. This narrative shows many similarities to a narrative in the *Sīra*; therefore, that version will be referred to for comparison and clarification.

The exegete finds that the words of the first part of the verse, up to "but their hearts don't believe," were revealed in relation to Abū Lubāba. Muqātil tells how Abū Lubāba indicated his throat to the Banū Qurayẓa,[66] meaning to say that "Muḥammad has come to command death among you. So do not refuse the judgment of Saʿd ibn Muʿādh." Muqātil adds that Saʿd ibn Muʿādh was their ally.[67]

Muqātil does not pursue this brief story, nor does he fill in the details.[68] Instead, he passes on to another narrative with the subsequent words of scripture, "and the Jews who listen to falsehood." He identifies these as the Jews of Madīna, and gives a list of particular individuals among them: Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf,[69] Kaʿb ibn Asad, Abū Lubāba, Saʿd ibn Mālik, Ibn Ṣūriyā, Kināna ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq, Sha's ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq, Sha's ibn Qays, Abū Rāfiʿ ibn Ḥuraymila, Yūsuf

[66] The editor Shiḥāta suggests, "this gesture means that Muḥammad will surely give a judgment of killing and slaughter concerning you." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 474. According to Muslim tradition, Abū Lubāba was a Companion of Muḥammad whom the Banū Qurayẓa trusted. M.J. Kister sets this incident in the context of the traditional account of the Massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa. "The Massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa: A re-examination of a tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986), 62.

[67] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 474.

[68] This incident is narrated in the *Sīra* as part of the story of the raid on the Banū Qurayẓa. *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, 715–729. After Muḥammad has besieged the Banū Qurayẓa for 25 nights, they ask Muḥammad to send them Abū Lubāba so that they can consult him. The Jews ask Abū Lubāba whether they should submit to the judgment of Muḥammad. He says yes, and points to his throat to mean slaughter. The Banū Qurayẓa then submit to the prophet's judgment. The tribe of al-Aws, who were allies of the Banū Qurayẓa, asks the prophet for fair treatment of their allies. The prophet appoints Saʿd ibn Muʿādh, one of al-Aws, to pronounce the judgment upon Banū Qurayẓa. The judgment of Saʿd ibn Muʿādh is "that the men should be killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, 721. Cf. M.J. Kister, "The Massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa," 61–96.

[69] In Muslim tradition, Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf was the son of an Arab father from the Ṭayyiʾ and a mother who belonged to the Jewish clan of Banū al-Naḍīr. Kaʿb is reputed to have opposed the rule of the prophet of Islam in Madīna. W. Montgomery Watt, "Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf," *EI2* (1978), Vol. 4, 315.

ibn ʿĀzar ibn Abī ʿĀzab, Salūl ibn Abī ʿĀzib, Salūl ibn Abī Salūl, and al-Bakhām ibn ʿAmr.[70] That they "listen to other folk who have not come to you," means these Jews of Madīna are listening to the Jews of Khaybar and are now about to pose a question to Muḥammad on their behalf.

At the phrase, "tampering with the words out of their places," Muqātil states that "the words" are the commandment of stoning. This is the third and final occurrence of this particular phrase in the Qurʾān, and it differs from the other two references in that here *min baʿd* appears instead of *ʿan*. Muqātil again glosses "out of their places" as "out of its declaration (*bayān*) in the Torah." The exegete offers no further gloss or etymological information on the verb *ḥarrafa*. But he immediately begins a long narrative with the characteristic words, *wa dhālika an*. The story Muqātil offers[71] goes like this:

A man named Yahūdhā and a woman named Busra, both Jews living in Khaybar, committed adultery (*zanā*) while married (*aḥṣan*).[72] The other Jews of Khaybar do not want to stone the couple, because both are from the nobility. So they decide to send the couple to Muḥammad, and let him determine their punishment. They are hoping for a more lenient sentence than stoning, thinking that "in his religion (*dīn*) is flogging rather than stoning." But they are not quite sure of the outcome, and voice the warning, "if he commands stoning for the two, beware of him." So the Jews of Khaybar write to the Jews of Madīna (Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Kaʿb ibn Asad, Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf and Abū Lubāba), and send the letter along with a delegation, including the guilty pair. They request the Jews of Madīna to ask the prophet of Islam what the ruling should be for adultery. "If he prescribes flogging to you, accept it," they write. Muqātil explains that flogging (*jald*) means beating the adulterers with a rope of palm fiber smeared with pitch. The punishment, known as *tajbīya*, also included blackening their faces and mounting them on a donkey facing the donkey's tail.

The Jews of Khaybar have warned their Madīnan counterparts that if Muḥammad happens to give a sentence of stoning, "beware of him, because he will steal what you possess." So Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf, Kaʿb ibn Asad and Abū Lubāba approach the Prophet,

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[70] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 474.

[71] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 475–477.

[72] On the sense of *aḥṣan*, see John Burton, "The Meaning of ʿIḥṣān,'" *Journal of Semitic Studies* XIX (1974), 47–75; and *idem*., "Muḥṣan," *EI2* (1993), Vol. 7, 474–5.

and ask him what the punishment for adultery should be. The angel Gabriel, writes Muqātil, comes to Muḥammad at that point and tells him, "stoning." The angel further tells him to appoint Ibn Ṣūriyā as a mediator between himself and the Jews. Muḥammad then proceeds to the Jews' house of study to meet their religious leaders. He says, "Oh community of the Jews, send out to me your scholars." In response, the religious leaders send out ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā, Abū Yāsir ibn Akhṭab and Wahb ibn Yahūdhā and announce, "These are our scholars." But Muḥammad prevails upon them until they disclose that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā is their greatest living Torah expert.[73] Ibn Ṣūriyā, a young man, is brought forward. Present to witness the encounter is ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām. Muḥammad then addresses the Jewish Torah expert:

> I adjure you by God, other than whom there is no god, the god of Banū Isrāʾīl, who brought you out of Egypt, and parted the sea for you, and drowned the people of Pharaoh, and revealed to you his book, making clear to you what he permits and what he forbids, and sheltered you with the cloud, and sent down manna and quails. Did you find in your book that stoning is [the punishment for] the one who in the state of marriage [commits adultery]?[74]

Ibn Ṣūriyā is stung to honesty by the prophet's striking adjuration and immediately exclaims, "Oh God, yes! If it were not that I feared that I would burn in the fire or be destroyed by the punishment, I would certainly have concealed (*katama*) from you when you asked me, and not confessed to you." Hearing this confirmation of the ruling given to him by Gabriel, Muḥammad declares, "God is greater! I am the first to revive one of the *sunnas* of God."[75] The prophet of Islam then pronounces the sentence for the two adulterers, and they are stoned beside the door of his mosque among Banū Ghanm ibn Mālik ibn al-Najjār.

In a continuation of the story, Ibn Ṣūriyā adds a further speech: "By God, O Muḥammad, the Jews do indeed know that you are a true

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[73] Burton, "Law and exegesis," 276. Literally, "This is the most knowledgeable one in the Torah who remains."

[74] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 476. cf. Burton, "Law and exegesis," 276.

[75] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 476. *anā awalu man aḥyā sunna min sunan allāh*. The phrase *sunnat Allāh* appears eight times in the Qurʾān: 33:38, 33:62 (x2), 35:43 (x2), 40:85, 48:23 (x2). "Our sunnah" also appears once with God as speaker, at Q 17:77. Rosalind W. Gwynne discusses these occurrences in "The Neglected Sunnah: Sunnat Allāh (The Sunnah of God)," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 10 (1993), 456–458.

prophet, but they envy you."[76] But after this confession, writes Muqātil, Ibn Ṣūriyā somehow lost faith (*kafara*). And in response to this, writes the exegete, God revealed Q 5:15: "Oh People of the Book, our messenger has come to you, making clear to you much of what you were concealing from the book."[77] Muqātil exegetes this cross reference to mean, [concealing] "what is in the Torah about the command of stoning and the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad."[78]

Muqātil goes on to quote a second part of Q 5:15, "and effacing much," and to gloss it as "not telling it." In exegeting the second phrase from the cross reference, Muqātil shifts into a new story of confrontation between Muḥammad and the Jews.[79] The key word seems to be "effacing" (*ʿafā*). Muḥammad says to the Jews, "If you want, I will tell you many things." Ibn Ṣūriyā responds, "I adjure you by God that you tell us much of what you command that you will efface." Ibn Ṣūriyā then quizzes the prophet: "Tell me about three characteristics (*khiṣāl*) which nobody knows except a prophet." Muḥammad invites Ibn Ṣūriyā to ask whatever he wants.

Ibn Ṣūriyā says, "Tell me about your sleep." The prophet answers, "My eyes sleep and my heart is awake." Ibn Ṣūriyā affirms the truth of the prophet, then says, "Tell me about the likeness of the child. Where does he resemble the father, and where the mother?" The prophet answers, "Whichever of them reaches sexual release first, gives the likeness." Ibn Ṣūriyā once more affirms the truth of the prophet, then poses a third question: "Now tell me what belongs to the man and what belongs to the woman from the child, and from which of them is

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[76] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 477. The *Sīra* version of this narrative is in many ways similar to what is offered by Muqātil. The notable difference, which is relevant to the development of the tampering motif, is that the *Sīra* adds a narrative about a specific act of *kitmān*. Ibn Isḥāq recounts, "When the apostle gave judgment about them he summoned them to the Torah. A rabbi sat there reading it having put his hand over the verse of stoning. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām struck the rabbi's hand, saying, 'This, O prophet of God, is the verse of stoning which he refuses (*abā*) to read to you.' The apostle said, 'Woe to you Jews! What has induced you to abandon (*tark*) the judgment of God which you hold in your hands?'" *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406. The *Sīra* then also includes the Jews' explanation of why they 'abandoned' the stoning penalty, hinted at near the beginning of Muqātil's narrative and also found in Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 5:41.

[77] The *Sīra* finds rather that this was the occasion of revelation of Q 5:41. *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 405.

[78] Muqātil does not provide this information in his exegesis of Q 5:15. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 463.

[79] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 477.

it?" The prophet answers, "The skin, blood, nails and hair belong to the woman, and the bone, nerves and veins belong to the man." A third time Ibn Ṣūriyā affirms that this is true, then asks, "Who is your *wazīr* from among the angels, and who brings you revelation (*waḥī*)?" The prophet answers, "Gabriel." Upon affirming the truth of the prophet a fourth time, Ibn Ṣūriyā converts to Islam (*aslama*).

After these two narratives, Muqātil returns to the words of scripture and rather quickly concludes his exegesis of Q 5:41. He repeats that the words "If you are given this then accept it" are spoken by the Jews of Khaybar to the Jews of Madīna, and gives the names of the four Madīnan protagonists once more. He also adds something not mentioned earlier, that if Muḥammad prescribes the stoning penalty it will mean that he is a prophet.[80]

Muqātil further writes that God did not desire to purify the hearts of the Jews from unbelief "when they concealed (*katama*) the commandment of stoning and the description of Muḥammad."[81] Rather, the Jews will have to suffer "degradation" in this life. This refers to the tribe of Qurayẓa, which were destined to suffer "killing and captivity." Similarly, the tribe of Naḍīr had to suffer "expulsion from their homes and possessions and gardens" and emigration to the Syrian towns of Adhriʿāt and Arīḥā.[82]

Q 7:162

> Then the evildoers of them substituted (*baddala*) a saying other than that which had been said to them; so we sent down upon them wrath out of heaven for their evildoing.

The wording of this verse is very similar to Q 2:59. In the first part of Q 7:162, the only difference to Q 2:59 is the addition of the word "of them." This verse is also preceded by a verse which mentions entering the gate of a town and the *ḥiṭṭatun* expression. Muqātil treats Q 7:162 only briefly.[83] As at Q 2:59, he understands the verse to refer to the verbal replacement of one expression with another, and the substitution of one posture for another.

80 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 477–478.
81 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 478.
82 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 478.
83 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 69.

Instead of the expression which they were commanded to say, writes Muqātil, the evildoers say "seeds on a piece of hair (*ḥibba fī shaʿra*)."[84] As for the posture in which they entered the gate, he describes it here as "crawling on their backside." Both of these details are considerably different from what the exegete wrote at Q 2:59. Two other differences of detail in this story come at Q 7:161: the town in which they are commanded to dwell is here called *bayt al-maqdis* (cf. Īlyāʾ at Q 2:59); and the appropriate bending posture of prostration is described by the expression *inḥināʾ* (cf. *mutaḥarrif* at Q 2:58).

Muqātil's Commentary on Verses Containing Verbs of Concealment

The Arabic verbs of concealment in the Qurʾān are *katama*, *asarra*, and *akhfā*. Verses containing *katama* are by far the most abundant. However, in their lists of Qurʾānic verses associated with tampering,[85] scholars of polemic indicate the verses containing the other two verbs of concealment with the same frequency.

Q 2:42

> And do not confound the truth with vanity, and do not conceal (*taktumū*) the truth wittingly.

In addition to a verb of concealment (*katama*), Q 2:42 contains a second verb of tampering (*labasa*), which will be treated separately below. Muqātil understands this verse to be the words of God spoken to the Jews.[86] He interprets the phrase "do not conceal the truth" to mean, "do not conceal the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad."[87] What is it that the Jews know (*antum taʿlamūna*) but will not reveal? According to Muqātil, they know that Muḥammad is a prophet and that his description (*naʿt*) is in the Torah.[88]

Just prior to his explanation of "do not conceal the truth," Muqātil uses the verb *katama* to explain two other actions of Jewish response. At Q 2:41, he understands "sell not my signs for a little price" to refer to the action of Jewish leaders to conceal the information about

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84 Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān*, 86.
85 See chapter two, pp. 26–29.
86 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101–102.
87 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 102.
88 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 102.

Muḥammad in the Torah from the lowly people of the Jews.[89] At Q 2:42, the exegete finds that the 'confounding' action of the Jews is that they acknowledge (*aqarra*) some of what they read about Muḥammad in the Torah, but conceal another part "in order to speak the truth concerning that [matter]."[90]

Q 2:77

> Do they not know that God knows what they keep hidden (*yusirrūna*) and what they proclaim?

Muqātil interprets Q 2:77 in the light of a story which he tells in explanation of the preceding verse, Q 2:76. At 2:76 he offers a short narrative about Jewish response to Muḥammad.[91] In this story, a Muslim man meets some Jews who are his allies, and asks them, "Do you find Muḥammad in your book?" The Jews answer, "Yes, the prophethood of your master is true, and we recognize (*ʿarafa*) him." When another group of Jews, headed by Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, hear about this, they take their fellow Jews aside and quiz them secretly (*fī al-sirr*), "Will you tell the companions of Muḥammad what God has opened to you?" The exegete writes that "what God has revealed to you" (Q 2:76) means "what is clear to you in the Torah from the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad."[92]

In his exegesis of the phrase "what they keep secret" in Q 2:77,[93] Muqātil merely offers the expression "under the open sky" (*fī al-khalāʾ*)—from the same verb used in Q 2:76 for "go privily." Then he quotes the Jews again from the narrative at Q 2:76 in a slightly different way. Here they affirm, "We find Muḥammad in our book and

[89] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101.
[90] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101.
[91] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 117–118.
[92] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118. Al-Farrāʾ offered a similar explanation for the phrase, "shall you tell them what God has opened to you" (Q 2:76): "This is from the saying of the Jews amongst themselves, 'Do not tell the Muslims that you find the description (*ṣifa*) of Muḥammad (PBUH) in the Torah, and you don't believe it, because this would become for them a proof against you.'" *Kitāb maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Aḥmad Yūsuf Najātī and Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Najjār, eds. (Beirut: Dār al-Sarūr, n.d.), Vol. I: 50. Al-Farrāʾ understands from this verse not only that a description of the prophet of Islam would be found in the Torah, but also that the Muslims could potentially prove their claim of the prophethood of Muḥammad from the Torah in the hands of the Jews.
[93] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118.

we certainly know him."[94] The exegete understands the verse to refer to an action of Jews to withhold information about Muḥammad which is clear to them in the Torah.

Q 2:140

> Who does a greater wrong than he who conceals (*katama*) a testimony that has come to him from God? And God is not heedless of the things you do.

A series of four verses in the middle of the second Sūra containing the verb *katama* begins with Q 2:140. In this verse, Muqātil understands the "testimony" (*shahāda*) to be "the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad in the Torah and the Injīl."[95] God had made this matter clear to the People of the Book, but they concealed this testimony which is with (*ʿinda*) them. Muqātil then gives a cross reference to Q 3:187 to support his own explanation of 'making clear': "And when God took a covenant from the People of the Book, to make it clear." The wording of Q 3:187 continues, "…and not conceal it…." The exegete repeats that the unspecified pronoun in Q 3:187 refers to "the matter of Muḥammad."

Muqātil understands this verse to refer to an action by the People of the Book to conceal information about the prophet of Islam which could be found in the scriptures in their possession.

Q 2:146

> Those to whom we have given the book recognize it as they recognize their sons, even though there is a party of them conceal (*yaktumūna*) the truth and that wittingly.

Muqātil explains Q 2:146 by telling a story about an encounter between the Jews and the prophet of Islam.[96] He specifies Abū Yāsir ibn Akhṭab, Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Kaʿb ibn Asad, Sallām ibn Ṣūriyā, Kināna ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq, Wahb ibn Yahūdhā and Abū Nāfiʿ as participants in this encounter.[97] The Jews ask Muḥammad, "Why do you circumambulate the *kaʿba* when it is merely erected stones?" In reply, Muḥammad

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94 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118.
95 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 143.
96 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 147–148.
97 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 148.

asserts, "You know that the circumambulation of the *bayt* ("house") is true because [the house] is the *qibla* which is written (*maktūb*) in the Torah and Injīl, but you conceal and deny (*jaḥada*) the truth that is in the book of God."[98]

One of the Jews, [Sallām] Ibn Ṣūriyā, protests that this is not so: "We have concealed nothing of what is in our book." Muqātil explains that this was the occasion for the sending down of "Those to whom we have given the book recognize it." The book in question is the Torah, he writes, and the object of Jewish knowledge is that the *bayt al-ḥarām* is the *qibla*. The "truth" (*ḥaqq*) which the Jews are concealing is therefore the information about the *kaʿba* in the Torah.[99] Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by the Jews to conceal and deny information which is recorded in the earlier scriptures.

Q 2:159

> Those who conceal (*yaktumūna*) the clear signs and the guidance that we have sent down, after we have shown them clearly in the book—they shall be cursed by God and the cursers.

In his exegesis of Q 2:159, Muqātil offers another short narrative.[100] Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and Ibn Ṣūriyā are again the Jews specified here. Muʿādh ibn Jabal, Saʿd ibn Muʿādh and Ḥāritha ibn Zayd ask the Jews about the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad, about stoning, and about other things. But the Jews conceal these things. Muqātil interprets the "clear signs" (*bayyināt*) as the information about stoning and the permitted and forbidden which God made clear in the Torah. The "guidance" (*hudan*) in turn, means the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad in the Torah. In order to further explain this verse, Muqātil references Q 29:49, "And none denies our signs but the unbelievers."[101] In this cross-reference,

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[98] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 148.

[99] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 148.

[100] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 152.

[101] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 153. The context of Muqātil's cross-reference in the Qurʾān is relevant for this study. At Q 29:46 are the commands to not argue with the People of the Book, and to say to them, "we believe in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to you." Those given the *kitāb* earlier will believe in the present *kitāb*, according to Q 29:47. And at 29:49, the clear signs are in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge. On those verses, Muqātil identifies the two books as the Torah and the Qurʾān, respectively; writes that the People of the Book who respond well to the Qurʾān are ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions; adds that these same are "those given knowledge" in the Torah; and understands the "signs" to

writes the exegete, the "signs" (*āyāt*) refer to Muḥammad, and the one who denies (*jaḥada*) is the one who denies (*kadhdhaba*) the Torah. It is the Jews who are guilty of this, and thus shall be cursed.

Muqātil understands this verse to mean the action of the Jews to conceal and deny information in the Torah about Muḥammad and several legal matters.

Q 2:174

> Those who conceal (*yaktumūna*) what of the book God has sent down on them, and sell it for a little price—they shall eat nothing but the fire in their bellies; God shall not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection neither purify them; there awaits them a painful chastisement.

In addition to a verb of concealment, *katama*, Q 2:174 contains the expression "selling for a little price," which will be dealt with separately below. Muqātil once more understands this verse to refer to Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and Ibn Ṣūriyā as representatives of the Jewish leaders.[102] The *kitāb* with which they were tampering is the Torah. The information in that book which they concealed was the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad. The parallel relationship of "selling for a little price" to *katama* also lends meaning to the concealment verb for the exegete. Muqātil writes that the Jewish leaders "chose to disbelieve" in Muḥammad.[103] This suggests that the concealment of information in scripture is similarly a deliberate act. Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by particular Jewish leaders in Madīna to conceal information in the Torah about the prophet of Islam.

Q 3:71

> People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal (*taktumūna*) the truth, while you have knowledge?

This verse appears near the beginning of an extended passage in the Qurʾān which Muqātil understands to be rich in tampering references.

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be the "sending out (*baʿth*) of Muḥammad in the Torah." "He is recorded (*maktūb*) in the Torah," concludes Muqātil. "Then they concealed (*katama*) his matter (*amr*) and rejected (*jaḥada*)." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. III, 385–6. Similar interpretations, becoming increasingly familiar from Sūras 2–7, would appear to be myriad in the balance of Muqātil's commentary.

[102] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 156.

[103] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 156.

The wording of Q 3:71 after "People of the Book" is almost identical to the wording of Q 2:42. Muqātil deals with Q 3:71 only very briefly.[104] Its meaning, he writes, is that the Jews acknowledged (*aqarra*) part of the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad, but concealed another part. He thus identifies 'acknowledging' as the opposite action to concealing. The "truth" which the Jews "know," according to the exegete, is that Muḥammad is a prophet and an apostle.

The context of the passage in Muqātil's commentary appears to qualify the tampering action which he pictures at Q 3:71. At 3:70, he understands that the People of the Book "bear witness" that "Muḥammad is the apostle of God and his description (*naʿt*) is with you (*maʿakum*) in the Torah."[105] In explanation of Q 3:72–73, he tells a story about Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf confusing the lowly people of the Jews. At the beginning of the day they say that the description of Muḥammad is in the Torah, but at the end of the day they say they were mistaken. "We looked in the Torah, and all of a sudden (*fa-idhā*) the description which is in the Torah is not the description of Muḥammad."[106] The two Jewish leaders further instruct the other Jews not to tell others about the matter of Muḥammad, lest the others argue with them. Muqātil suggests here that the motivations of the Jewish leaders are envy towards Muḥammad and a desire to maintain their religious superiority.[107]

With this context in mind, Muqātil understands Q 3:71 to mean an action by the Jews of Madīna to conceal information about Muḥammad in the Torah. According to Muqātil, the Jews refuse to acknowledge that information openly in an effort to assert their special standing with God.

Q 3:187

> And when God took compact with those who had been given the book: "You shall make it clear unto the people, and not conceal (*taktumūna*) it." But they threw it behind their backs, and sold it for a small price—how evil was that their selling!

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[104] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284.
[105] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 283.
[106] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284.
[107] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284.

"Those who had been given the book" are the Jews, according to Muqātil, and the book in question is the Torah.[108] God had made a covenant with the Jews to make clear "the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad" in the Torah. Instead, the Jews concealed both the information about Muḥammad and the covenant stipulation "that you follow (*tabiʿa*) him." Muqātil's explanations of the expressions "throw behind backs" and "sell for a small price" will be examined separately below. Here it can simply be noted that these expressions too are associated with "concealing (*kitmān*) the matter of Muḥammad."[109]

The tampering action which Muqātil is picturing here is further qualified by his exegesis of the following verse, Q 3:188. There he tells a story of a Jewish confession of faith in the prophet of Islam. The Jews say in the presence of Muḥammad, "We recognize (*ʿarafa*) you and we believe (*ṣaddaqa*) you." However, writes the exegete, "that was not in their hearts."[110] The issue in this short narrative is duplicity. Muqātil thus understands Q 3:187 to refer to an action of the Jews as a people to fail to act appropriately according to the knowledge about Muḥammad which they possess in the Torah.

Q 4:37

> Such as are niggardly, and bid other men to be niggardly, and themselves conceal (*yaktumūna*) the bounty that God has given them. We have prepared for the unbelievers a humbling chastisement.

Muqātil identifies the subject of Q 4:37 to be the chiefs of the Jews, specifying Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf.[111] The Jewish leaders used to command the lowly people of the Jews "to conceal (*kitmān*) the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad." Their motive for this, writes Muqātil, was fear lest the ordinary Jews "disclose it and explain it. So they erased (*maḥā*) it from the Torah." Editor ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta puts quotation marks around the foregoing clause and notes that it is missing from one of the two main manuscripts he is consulting.[112] Muqātil then interprets the "bounty" (*faḍl*) of God to be the matter and description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad in the Torah.

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108 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 320.
109 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 320.
110 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 321.
111 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 372.
112 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 372 n. 2.

Muqātil understands this verse to refer to an action by Jewish leaders to command the Jews under their influence to conceal the information about Muḥammad in the Torah. That the exegete would interpret "conceal" with "erase" is unusual, and—in the perspective of his explanations of this series of eight *katama* verses—seems out of place.

Q 5:15

> People of the Book! Now there has come to you our messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing (*tukhfūna*) of the book, and effacing many things. There has come to you from God a light, and a book manifest.

A third Arabic verb for concealing, *akhfā*, appears for the first time at Q 5:15. Muqātil explains this verse only very briefly.[113] He identifies the locus of tampering ("the *kitāb*") as "the Torah." The objects which people have concealed (*akhfā* perf.), he writes, are "the matter (*amr*) of stoning and the matter of Muḥammad."[114] The actors are not specified here, but at Q 5:13 they are the Jews, and at 5:14 they are the Christians. The exegete further explains the scriptural "effacing (or forgiving, *ʿafā ʿan*) much" to mean "disregarding (*tajāwaza*) much of what you hid (*katama*)." His use of *katama* as a synonym for *akhfā* suggests that Muqātil understands Q 5:15 to mean the action of unspecified People of the Book to conceal the information about stoning and about Muḥammad which is in the Torah.

Q 6:91

> They measured not God with his true measure when they said, "God has not sent down aught on any mortal." Say: "Who sent down the book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding (*tukhfūna*) much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers." Say: "God." Then leave them alone, playing their game of plunging.

Muqātil explains the phrase "hiding much" in the light of a narrative which he recounts to explain an earlier part of Q 6:91.[115] He glosses *akhfā* with *asarra*, and explains that the objects of concealment were the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad and the matter of stoning in the

[113] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 463.
[114] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 463.
[115] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 574–575.

Torah.[116] Muqātil's narrative is linked to the scriptural phrase, "God has not sent down aught on any mortal." He writes that this phrase descended concerning a Jew named Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf. Mālik was arguing with ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb about whether "the prophet" is written about (*maktūb*) in the Torah. In the heat of the argument Mālik became angry and exclaimed, "God has not sent down a book on anyone!"[117] In response, the prophet of Islam quizzes Mālik about the book which Moses brought.[118]

In light of this narrative, it is clear that Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by a particular Jewish scholar to deny what is written about Muḥammad in the Torah.[119]

Muqātil's Commentary on Verses Containing Other Verbs of Tampering

In addition to verses containing verbs of alteration or concealment, scholarly studies on the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption indicate additional verses which they associate with tampering. The scholarly lists intersect with the Qurʾān's semantic field of tampering at verses which contain the verbs *labasa* ('to confound'), *lawā* ('to twist') and *nasiya* ('to forget').

Confounding

The phrase "confound (*yalbisū*) the truth with vanity" appears at both Q 2:42 and 3:71, cited above. In both cases, Muqātil glosses *labasa* with the verb *khalaṭa*.[120] He explains at Q 2:42 that the Jews "mix things up" by acknowledging one part of the matter of Muḥammad and concealing another part, "so that they may speak the truth concerning that

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[116] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 575.

[117] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 574. In Muqātil's explanation of Q 2:1, two Jews of Madīna say a similar expression, "God has not sent down a book after Moses"—though Mālik is not one of the speakers in that encounter. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.

[118] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 574. Muqātil adds that the Jews removed (*ʿazala*) Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf from the fellowship of the rabbis (*rabāniyya*) after this incident!

[119] Daniel Madigan argues that "*kitāb*" in the Qurʾān does not necessarily mean something written down. One of the bases of his argument is the wording of Q 6:91, which seems to separate the *kitāb* of Moses from its being written down on *qarāṭīs* ('parchments'). *The Qurʾân's Self-Image*, 210–211, 13f., etc. However, Muqātil does not appear to pick up on this distinction.

[120] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101, 284. Khalaṭa means to mix, mingle, confuse or confound.

[matter]."[121] There the exegete also makes reference to Q 3:71, and quotes part of a third verse which contains *labasa*, Q 6:82: "…and have not confounded their belief with evildoing." He immediately glosses the cross reference, "meaning have not mixed (*khalaṭa*) with associating (*shirk*)."[122]

Muqātil's exegesis of the second occurrence of the phrase adds the story about two Jewish leaders changing their instructions to the Jewish community within a single day, described above. At the beginning of the day, the leaders tell them to "believe in the *qurʾān*." But by evening, they say, "We looked in the Torah, and suddenly the description which is in the Torah is not the description of Muḥammad." The exegete remarks that in this way the Jewish leaders "make their religion (*dīn*) obscure (*labasa ʿalā*) for them. Perhaps they are in doubt concerning their religion."[123] In both passages, the matter of Muḥammad with which the Jews are tampering is that he is a prophet and an apostle, and that his description is "with" the Jews in the Torah.[124]

At Q 2:42 and 3:71, Muqātil understands the verb *labasa* to refer to an action of Jewish leaders to confuse the lowly people by hiding information about Muḥammad which is in the Torah, and by giving them mixed messages about how they should respond to the prophet of Islam.

Twisting

> And there is a sect of them twist (*yalwuna*) their tongues with the book, that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book; and they say, "It is from God," yet it is not from God, and they speak falsehood against God, and that wittingly. (Q 3:78)

The expresssion "twisting tongues" appears at Q 3:78 and also in one of the *ḥarrafa* verses examined above, Q 4:46. In his exegesis of Q 3:78, Muqātil immediately identifies the "sect" as a group of four Jews: Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf, Abū Yāsir, Judayy ibn Akhṭab

121 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101.
122 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 102. At Q 6:82, Muqātil gives a similar gloss for "have not confounded their faith with evildoing": "meaning have not mixed (*khalaṭa*) their faith (*taṣdīq*) with associating (*shirk*), and have not worshipped other than him." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 573. In the context of that explanation, Muqātil makes no mention of the Jews, a book, or an action of tampering.
123 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284.
124 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 102, 283–4.

and Shaʿba ibn ʿAmr.[125] He finds "twist their tongues with the book" to mean, "with twisting (*layy*): tampering (*taḥrīf*) with the tongue concerning the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad."[126] However, in the remainder of the verse the exegete pictures a quite different action of tampering. Here the locus of tampering is the Torah itself. On "it is not part of the book" Muqātil writes that the Jews wrote something other than the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad, "and they erased (*maḥā*) his description."[127] The Jews wrote a description which was not the description of the prophet of Islam, and was not from God. This exegesis seems to relate to the story about Jewish leaders which Muqātil tells at Q 3:72,[128] as well as to his understanding of Q 2:79, to be described below.

At Q 4:46, "twisting (*layyan*) with their tongues" appears in parallel with "slandering (*ṭaʿnan*) religion." In order to explain these actions, Muqātil describes a claim made by the Jews. "They say, 'The religion of Muḥammad is nothing, but what we have is the [true] religion.'"[129] On a later part of the verse, "It would have been better for them," Muqātil writes, "than the tampering (*taḥrīf*) and the slander (*ṭaʿn*) of religion."[130] Here Muqātil's phrase "the tampering and the slander of religion" appears to gloss the scriptural "twisting with their tongues and slandering religion."

Muqātil understands the verb *lawā* to mean a verbal action of Jews in inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam. However, the Qurʾānic contexts of the two occurrences appear to influence his exegetical direction. In one case (at Q 3:78) his interpretation concerns

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[125] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 286.
[126] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 286.
[127] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 286. The verb *maḥā* (also "to wipe off, rub out, scratch out," etc.) does not appear in the Qurʾān in relation to the theme of tampering with earlier scriptures; but it appears at Q 17:12 in the sense of "make dark," and at Q 13:39 and 42:24 in the sense of "blot out" (with God as subject). In Muqātil's commentary *maḥā* appears first in his explanation of Q 2:79 (see below), and later in his comments on Q 4:37 (noted above, pp. 94–95).
[128] described above, p. 93.
[129] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 376. The *Sīra* also offers an explanation of the actions of twisting and slandering. It quotes the full passage Q 4:44–46, prefacing it with the following occasion of revelation: "Rifāʿa was a notable Jew. When he spoke to the apostle he twisted his tongue and said: 'Give us your attention, Muḥammad, so that we can make you understand.' Then he attacked (*ṭaʿana*) Islam and reviled (*ʿāba*) it. So God sent down concerning it…." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 400.
[130] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 377.

the information about Muḥammad in the Torah, and in the other case (at Q 4:46) he finds an action of insult toward Islam.[131]

Forgetting

The phrase "they have forgotten (*nasiya*) a portion of what they were reminded of" appears at both Q 5:13 and 5:14. Muqātil understands the first occurrence to refer to the Jews[132] and the second occurrence to the Christians.[133]

On the forgetting of the Jews, Muqātil writes about the covenant which God made with the Children of Israel, stipulating that they would believe in Muḥammad. According to Muqātil, both the stipulation and the description of Muḥammad could be found in the Torah. But when God sent Muḥammad, the Children of Israel disbelieved (*kafara*) in him and envied (*ḥasada*) him, and said, "This one is not from the descendents of Isḥāq, but rather he is from the descendents of Ismāʿīl."[134] Instead of offering a gloss for *nasiya*, Muqātil portrays an action of the Jews to disbelieve in and envy the prophet of Islam. The action takes place after the appearance of the prophet, when the Jews recognize that he is not of their own kind.

On Q 5:14 Muqātil writes that God took a covenant with the *Naṣāra* as well—in the Injīl—concerning faith in Muḥammad: "that they believe in Muḥammad (PBUH) and follow him (*tabiʿa*) and declare him true (*ṣaddaqa*), since he is written with them in the Injīl."[135] This time the phrase "they forgot a portion" is glossed, "they neglected (*taraka*)[136] a portion"; and "what they were reminded of" is identified as "what they were commanded about faith in Muḥammad (PBUH) and the attestation (*taṣdīq*) to him."[137]

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[131] This is also the direction of the interpretation of "twisting with their tongues" (Q 4:46) of al-Farrāʾ. He writes that this means they say *rāʿinā*, "aiming it toward the abuse (*shatm*) of Muḥammad." This action indicates what is meant by twisting (*al-layy*), he writes. *Kitāb maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Vol. I, 272. At the first occurrence of the term *rāʿinā* at Q 2:104, al-Farrāʾ similarly writes that this is a word of abuse (*shatm*) with the Jews. *Kitāb maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Vol. I, 69.

[132] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461.

[133] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462.

[134] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461.

[135] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462.

[136] The gloss of *taraka* suggests a stronger sense for *nasiya* in Muqātil's mind. *Taraka* has a range of meanings from "leave" to "omit."

[137] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462.

In Q 5:13 and 5:14, Muqātil understands the verb *nasiya* to mean an action on the part of the People of the Book to transgress their prior agreements with God. The Jews choose to disbelieve in the prophet of Islam out of envy. The Christians choose to neglect God's command concerning Muḥammad. In both cases Muqātil specifies that the necessary information about Muḥammad is recorded in the scriptures which they have.[138]

Muqātil's Commentary on Verses Containing Expressions of Action

A number of verses which have been associated with the accusation of scriptural corruption fall outside the semantic field of tampering. The verbs in these verses do not immediately bring tampering to mind, but nevertheless the expressions of which they are part have triggered thoughts of various tampering actions. The expressions are "write the book with hands," "sell for a little price," "throw behind backs," and "invent a falsehood against God."

Write the Book with Hands

> So woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings. (Q 2:79)

Apart from the four *ḥarrafa* verses described above, the verse which is indicated most frequently in scholarly articles on *taḥrīf* is Q 2:79. Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by Jewish leaders in Madīna to alter the text of the Torah.[139]

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[138] Caspar and Gaudeul indicate two other *nasiya* verses, Q 7:51 and 7:165 ("Textes de la tradition musulmane," 63), but Muqātil does not understand these to refer to the earlier scriptures. However at Q 2:44, a verse not included in the scholarly lists of 'tampering verses' given in chapter 2, Muqātil finds an action of inappropriate response to Muḥammad ("Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite the book?"). He writes that the Jews encourage the companions of the prophet of Islam to follow (*tabiʿa*) Muḥammad, but neglect (*taraka*) themselves and don't follow him. Muqātil identifies the book they recite as the Torah, "in which is the announcement (*bayān*) of the matter (*amr*) and description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 102. This explanation shows a sense of an intact Torah in the possession of the Jews and a failure to act upon its attestation of Muḥammad, similar to Muqātil's understanding of *nasiya* at Q 5:13 & 14.

[139] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118.

Muqātil explains that "those who write the *kitāb* with their hands" refers to writing something other than the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad. He writes: "This is about how the chiefs of the Jews of Madīna erased (*maḥā*) the description of Muḥammad (PBUH) from the Torah, and wrote other than his description, and told the Jews something other than the description of Muḥammad."[140] In explaining a later part of the verse, "what their hands have written," Muqātil offers: "meaning in the Torah of the alteration (*taghyīr*) of the description of Muḥammad."[141]

As noted above, the exegete finds a similar meaning in his interpretation of Q 3:78, in which the language of a *kitāb* and a claim that something is "from God" reappears. There too he writes that the Jewish leaders wrote something other than the description of Muḥammad and erased his description.[142] Muqātil therefore understands the expression "write the book with hands" at Q 2:79 to mean an action by Jewish leaders in Madīna during the career of the prophet of Islam there to alter the text of the Torah in their possession.

Sell for a Little Price

Another expression in Q 2:79 which came to be associated with tampering in the minds of the exegetes is "selling for a little price." The language of commerce first appears in the Qurʾān in Q 2:16. In explanation of the clause, "Those are they who have bought error at the price of guidance," Muqātil offers a story of Jewish response to Muḥammad:

> This is about how the Jews found the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad the prophet (PBUH) in the Torah before he was sent, and believed in him, assuming that he was from the descendents of Isḥāq, upon whom

[140] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118.

[141] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118. The verb *ghayyara* does not appear in the Qurʾān in relation to the theme of tampering with earlier scriptures. Of its six occurrences, it appears twice in Q 13:11: "God changes (*yughayyiru*) not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves." The verb also appears twice at Q 8:53 in a phrase similar to that of Q 13:11. At Q 47:15 the flavor of the rivers of milk in the garden is unchanging; and Q 4:119 contains the mysterious phrase, "surely I will command them and they will change God's creation." *Taghyīr*, the verbal noun used by Muqātil, though it does not appear in the Qurʾān, eventually became a technical term for scriptural alteration alongside *taḥrīf* and *tabdīl*. See for example Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 344.

[142] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 286 (above, p. 98).

> be peace. Then when Muḥammad (PBUH) was sent from among the Arabs, from the descendents of Ismāʿīl, upon whom be peace, they disbelieved (*kafara*) in him out of envy (*ḥasad*), and "purchased error with guidance."[143]

Similar phrases are found elsewhere in the Qurʾān, and Muqātil often understands these to refer to the Jewish response to the prophet of Islam.[144]

The specific phrase, "sell (*ishtarā*) for a little price" first occurs at Q 2:41, then repeats some eight times in the Qurʾān.[145] At Q 2:41, the object of the verb is "signs" (*āyāt*), and Muqātil understands the phrase to mean an action of Jewish leaders to conceal the matter of Muḥammad from the lowly people of the Jews.[146] The exegete then offers a description of the living situation of the Jewish leaders which he subsequently repeats many times in his commentary: "The chiefs had among them food from everything [that was held in] common from their seed and their fruits; and if they had followed (*tābaʿa*) Muḥammad (PBUH) this food would certainly have been withheld from them."[147] When "sell for a little price" appears together with the verb *katama*, Muqātil similarly understands the Jewish leaders to be concealing information about Muḥammad for gain.[148] At Q 2:79, however, the exegete associates the leaders' financial motivation with writing falsehoods in the Torah.[149]

Muqātil thus understands the scriptural expression "sell for a little price" to indicate a financial motivation among Jewish leaders for tampering with the Torah. His characterization of Jewish leaders as 'greedy for gain' will be taken up again in the description of the commentary's narrative framework in chapter 6.

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143 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 91.

144 At Q 2:86, 2:175, 3:177, 4:44; cf. 2:90, 2:102. At Q 2:90 Muqātil again finds the motivation of envy of Muḥammad "since he was from the Arabs"; at Q 2:175 and 4:44 he writes that the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad took place after the prophet of Islam was sent. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 122, 156, 376.

145 At Q 2:79, 2:174, 3:77, 3:187, 3:199, 5:44, 9:9, 16:95.

146 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101.

147 A comparable expression comes in al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1037): "The Rabbis and the learned ones used to receive provisions from the rest of the Jews and they feared that they would not receive it if they revealed the (true) description (*ṣifa*)...." *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006), 15. Translation by Rippin in "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 16.

148 at Q 2:174 and 3:187. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 156, 320–321.

149 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118–119.

Throw Behind Backs

> When there has come to them a messenger from God confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the book reject (*nabadha*) the book of God behind their backs, as though they knew not. (Q 2:101)

The expression "throw behind backs" appears only twice in the Qurʾān, but polemicists and exegetes have traditionally associated this idiom with actions of tampering. At Q 2:101, Muqātil interprets the phrase to mean an inappropriate response to information about Muḥammad in the Torah.[150] The "messenger from God" is Muḥammad, who comes to the Jews "confirming (*ṣaddaqa*) that he is a prophet and an apostle with them (*maʿahum*) in the Torah."[151] But a group of Jews reject what is in the Torah about the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad through two specific actions: they do not follow (*tabiʿa*) him, and they do not make clear to the people that "Muḥammad is an apostle and prophet according to his attestation (*taṣdīq*) which is with them."[152]

At Q 3:187, cited above, "throw behind backs" appears together with the verb *katama* and the expression "sell for a small price." In this verse we find the wording which Muqātil has already used at Q 2:101, "make it clear to the people." In his explanation of Q 3:187, Muqātil adds that included in the covenant which God made with the Children of Israel in the Torah was the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad and the stipulation that they follow (*tabiʿa*) him.[153] But the Jews threw the covenant behind their backs by concealing (*kitmān*) the matter of Muḥammad.[154]

Muqātil understands the expression "throw behind backs" to refer to an action of Jewish leaders to transgress their covenant with God by failing to acknowledge and broadcast what is written about Muḥammad in the Torah, and to submit to the authority of the prophet of Islam.

Invent a Lie Against God

> Whoso forges (*iftarā*) falsehood against God after that, those are the evildoers. (Q 3:94)

150 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 126.
151 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 126.
152 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 126.
153 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 320.
154 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 320.

The expression "invent a lie against God" does not occur in any verse connected by scholars to the doctrine of scriptural corruption. However, W.M. Watt described this expression as a "corollary" of the charge of concealing,[155] and the ambiguity of *iftarā* ("forge or fabricate a lie, or falsehood")[156] could possibly bring textual falsification to mind.[157] When Muqātil first treats the expression at Q 3:94, he interprets it in light of a story about Jacob which he tells at Q 3:93.[158] There the focus is food which God made lawful to Israel and which the people of Israel forbade themselves. The challenge, "Bring the Torah and read it, if you are truthful," also comes at Q 3:93. Muqātil writes that inventing a lie against God in this context would be to say that God had prohibited a certain food in the Torah.[159]

The expression also occurs in close proximity to tampering verses at Q 4:50 and 6:93. At 4:50, the lie which the Jews invent is their saying, "We are sons of God and his beloved ones."[160] Similarly at Q 6:21, the lie is the statement that God has a partner (*sharīk*).[161] Then at Q 6:93, Muqātil understands "inventing a lie against God" to refer to the story of Musaylima ibn Ḥabīb the liar (*kadhdhāb*) "when he claimed that God inspired him with prophethood."[162]

There are two other occurrences of this expression in the Qurʾān,[163] but the verses examined above suffice to show that the exegete understands "invent a lie against God" to signal a variety of tampering actions which are not associated with falsification of earlier scriptures. A similar expression with the same object, *kadhib*, appears twice in an important tampering context. At Q 3:75, Muqātil interprets the phrase "speak a lie against God" to mean that Jews are lying about what is in

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155 "The Early Development," 51.

156 *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 6, 2391.

157 Toshihiko Izutsu offers this expression as an example of a semantic cluster: "In the Qurʾān the verb *iftará* ('to invent', 'to forge') most frequently takes as its grammatical 'object' the noun *kadhib* (a 'lie'), thus forming a well-nigh inseparable group." *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, 40.

158 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 290.

159 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 290.

160 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 378. This is the claim of Jews and Christians at Q 5:18.

161 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 554.

162 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 575. Here the exegete is following the wording of the verse itself, "he said 'I am inspired (*waḥā* IV)' when he was not inspired in anything." Musaylima appears in Muqātil's *Tafsīr* once more in the 'rabbinical' test of prophethood story at Q 18:9. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 575. Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 122.

163 At Q 6:144 and 7:37.

the Torah concerning "the prohibition of shedding blood and taking wealth unlawfully."[164] The second occurrence comes at Q 3:78, where it is associated with an accusation of textual falsification. The 'lie' that the Jews speak is that what they have written is the description of Muḥammad.[165]

Analysis of Muqātil's Exegesis

Moving from observation and description into analysis and reflection leads this study into the consideration of many fascinating motifs as well as some difficult questions. The analysis follows the same order as the introduction of the commentary passages, beginning with Muqātil's exegesis of verses containing verbs of alteration.

Muqātil's Understanding of the Alteration Verses

Once more, because of the prominence of the *ḥarrafa* verses in the scholarly lists of verses associated with the accusation of alteration, Muqātil's exegesis of these four verses is analyzed in the greatest depth. Muqātil reveals his understanding of *ḥarrafa* in these verses largely through the narratives he offers. He also supplies a simple gloss for the Qurʾānic text which often indicates what he considers synonyms for important terms in this study. Sometimes he will further specify the content of vague terms such as *kalim*. Wherever possible, he gives particular names for the anonymous scriptural references.

Adding Words to a Verbal Report

Muqātil develops the meaning of *ḥarrafa* in Q 2:75 by telling a story about the Jews at the time of Moses. At the start of the commentary on this verse, the people in the foreground are the Jews of Madīna, and the issue is their believing in, or declaring the truth of, Muḥammad. In his commentary on the following verse, Muqātil continues to describe the Jews of Madīna and their response to the prophet. In the extended narrative offered to explain the meaning of "a party of them that heard the word (*kalām*) of God then tampered with it," *kalām* is used repeatedly

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164 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 285.
165 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 286.

to refer to a verbal communication of God. They *heard* the *kalām*, according to the verse and reinforced in the commentary. The action of the group from the seventy Jews which explains for Muqātil the meaning of *ḥarrafa* is their adding to the verbal report of the commandments of God an extra alleviation clause. The exegete offers this story before actually giving the part of the verse in which *ḥarrafa* appears. After giving the tampering clause from the verse, Muqātil gives no further comment on the verb *ḥarrafa*, which signals that he had already explained the tampering action indicated by the verb before introducing that part of the verse.

It is the addition of a kind of escape clause to the verbal commands of God which Muqātil finds to be the tampering (*ḥarrafa*) indicated by the verse. There is no indication in Muqātil's exegesis that *kalām* refers to a written record, or that the tampering envisioned in the verse had to do with a written record. There is no mention here of the Torah. Thus the verb *ḥarrafa* appears in the verse, and it is repeated in the commentary, but Muqātil does not understand this verb to mean here a material alteration of the text of the Torah (or any other scripture). *Kalām* is the object, repeated by Muqātil, and it does not mean for him a written text of scripture. Therefore, Muqātil understands the use of *ḥarrafa* in Q 2:75 to indicate an action of tampering other than causing a material change to a text of earlier scripture.

Abusing the Prophet and Slandering Religion

The meaning of *ḥarrafa* in Q 4:46 for Muqātil reflects an action which is described in the same verse. The exegete offers the term *taḥrīf* to qualify the action which he envisions from the verb *ḥarrafa*, but he does not give a definition of the term. Instead, he characterizes the action with a phrase from further on in the verse itself, "twisting with their tongues." He identifies the object of the verb as the description of Muḥammad. And he glosses the mysterious phrase 'out of its places' as 'out of its declaration (*bayān*) in the Torah.' The meanings of *bayān* also include clearness, plainness, and *obviousness*. Muqātil means to say here that there is something that is clear from the Torah which the Jews know but are for some reason not acting upon. The most straightforward conclusion to draw from this is that Muqātil envisions an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Madīna. There is no suggestion in this exegesis that the Jews of Madīna are in possession of a previously corrupted text. There is also no indication of an accu-

sation that the Jews are in the process of corrupting a text in their possession.

The speeches which follow in the verse provide for Muqātil the illustration of what he means by the verb *ḥarrafa*. By all indications—in the verse itself, in the exegete's brief glosses at Q 4:46, and in his exegesis of Q 2:104—these are speeches of resistance or attempts to abuse. Muqātil's comment on "twisting with their tongues and slandering religion" is that the Jews are denigrating the religion of Muḥammad in contrast to their own. He therefore understands the speeches to signify disrespect or insubordination to Muḥammad. In his explanation of Q 2:104, where *rāʿinā* first appears, he understands this mysterious word to be a term of abuse among the Jews. The object of the verb "twisting" in this scenario is not the Torah or the description of Muḥammad therein, but rather the religion of Muḥammad in the present encounter.[166] When Muqātil uses the term *taḥrīf* a second time, he joins it with "slandering religion" in such a manner as to show that he understands the *taḥrīf* of the Jews to be their twisting with their tongues.

It is the Jews' action of abuse toward the prophet of Islam which Muqātil finds to be the tampering (*ḥarrafa*) indicated by the verse. There is no hint here of a concept of a material alteration of the text of the Torah. Rather, in his commentary on the expression *muṣaddiq* in the verse which follows, Muqātil claims an attestation of the prophethood and apostleship of Muḥammad "with you in the Torah." The attestation is *with* (*maʿ*) the Jews. There is no suggestion here that the attestation is no longer with them because the text has previously been corrupted.

Refusing to Acknowledge the Truth

The exegesis of the verb *ḥarrafa* in Q 5:13 is dominated by the concept of covenant, a key term which appears in the Qurʾānic verse immediately prior. Muqātil presents the idea that the covenant which God took with the people of Israel included a clause to anticipate and accept Muḥammad. Muqātil supplies a gloss on 'the words' (*kalim*), that they

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[166] Wansbrough wrote that at Q 4:46, "the action explicit in *taḥrīf* could only apply to the written word." *Quranic Studies*, 76. However, Muqātil seems to have understood the tampering action to be the speech of the Jews in conversation/confrontation with Muḥammad. The same could be said of Ṭabarī's understanding of the verse, described below. Cf. Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 101.

are the description (*ṣifa*) of Muḥammad. An important feature of this passage is the phrase, "He is written (*maktūb*) with them (*ʿindahum*) in the Torah." The most natural conclusion to draw from Muqātil's use of this expression is that he envisions an intact text of the Torah in the possession of the Jews of Madīna. At issue for the exegete is not a previously corrupted text, but rather an inappropriate response to what is in the text. The basis for this conclusion is that according to Muqātil, when Muḥammad appeared "they disbelieved in him and envied him, and said, 'This one is not from the descendants of Isḥāq, but rather he is from the descendants of Ismāʿīl.'" The narrative logic is that the description of Muḥammad is there in the Torah which they possess, but that when he appears they refuse to acknowledge it out of envy.

In his exegesis of the following verse, Muqātil seems to understand the Christians in a similar way. What is clear about Muḥammad, and the covenant agreement to follow him and to believe in him, "is written (*maktūb*) with them (*ʿindahum*) in the Injīl." The forgetting of the Christians is glossed *taraka*, which could mean to neglect, but could also mean omit, renounce, abandon or pass over. It is not clear what Muqātil has in mind here, but it is hard to see how he could take the meaning of forgetting beyond neglect. Certainly the theme of rejection, denial, and failure to believe is the general mood.

It is the Jews' action of deceit toward the prophet of Islam in a face-to-face encounter which Muqātil finds to be the tampering (*ḥarrafa*) indicated by Q 5:13. In the exegete's mind, the scriptures of the Jews and Christians contain a covenant in which the proper response to Muḥammad is specified. But the envy that has grown in the hearts of the People of the Book, born out of ethnic pride, has caused them to conceal and to neglect the truths written in the divine books they possess.

Setting aside a Torah Command

In Muqātil's exegesis of *ḥarrafa* in Q 5:41, the long narrative about the Jews and the verse of stoning takes centre stage.[167] Since Muqātil gives

[167] Georges Vajda claimed that the stoning verse story was "the most typical case for the illegitimate alteration of the Torah, upon which the Muslim tradition insists with the greatest complacence." "Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṯ," *Journal Asiatique* ccxxix (1937), 92.

no etymological or grammatical explanation for *ḥarrafa*, the meaning of the verb in this case must come out of the narrative he offers. Elements in Muqātil's narrative, such as the house of study, asking for the best Torah scholar, the prophet's question about finding the ruling in the book, and Ibn Ṣūriyā's remark that he might have concealed the Torah judgment if Muḥammad had not adjured him to honesty, all point to a scenario in which an intact Torah is in the possession of the Jews of Madīna at the time of the prophet of Islam. There is no suggestion in the story that the text of the Torah which the Jews of Madīna possess in their house of study has previously been corrupted. Rather, the ruling against adultery is found in that book, but the Jews do not want to apply it because of the status of the adulterers, and therefore they do not acknowledge it openly. Ibn Ṣūriyā confesses to Muḥammad that he found the stoning penalty in the Torah, and there is no indication here that he is referring to a Torah which has since been corrupted. Ibn Ṣūriyā is described as a young man, which suggests both that he is bright and fresh,[168] and that the Torah in which he 'found' the stoning penalty is a current copy.

A number of elements in this story make it a prime generator of meaning and momentum and influence the understanding of the verse: First of all, the dishonesty and deviousness of the Jews of Khaybar, and the connivance of the Jews of Madīna, are revealed to the reader right at the start. A test of prophethood is set up, the details of which Muḥammad does not know but to which the reader is privy.[169] The conditions of successfully passing the test are provided beforehand, along with the possibility that Muḥammad may succeed—and that the Jews know he may succeed. With the help of Gabriel, Muḥammad devises a clever stratagem for identifying the Jewish scholar who knows the Torah best. He adjures Ibn Ṣūriyā, with insight into his Jewish religion, in such a way that he cannot but tell the truth. And the climax is striking: this young, bright scholar who knows the Torah best of all admits that he found the stoning penalty in that scripture; and then adds for good measure—while he is still feeling sworn to honesty and before he mysteriously disbelieves again—"By God, Oh Muḥammad, the Jews do indeed know that you are a true prophet, but they envy

[168] The *Sīra* also describes Ibn Ṣūriya as a top scholar, "the most learned man of his time in the Hijaz in Torah studies." Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 239.

[169] On the 'rabbinical' test of prophethood, see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 124–125.

you." Muḥammad has successfully passed the test of prophethood that was cynically placed before him, and his exultation at reviving "one of the *sunna*s of God" becomes an epiphany of self-discovery.

There are details in the narrative, and in Muqātil's 'supercommentary' on the story, which help further to qualify what the exegete understands to be the meaning of *ḥarrafa* in Q 5:41. Ibn Ṣūriyā tells Muḥammad he would have concealed (*katama*) the Torah ruling from him if he had not been afraid of eternal punishment. Then immediately after the mention of Ibn Ṣūriyā's apostasy, Muqātil quotes 5:15, which uses another verb for concealing (*akhfā*). The exegete explains this cross reference to mean hiding what is in the Torah about the command of stoning and the description of Muḥammad. Muqātil again says, later in his comments on 5:41, that the action of the Jews, for which God does not want to purify their hearts, is concealing (*katama*). Taken together, these details show that the tampering action which the exegete understands from *ḥarrafa* here is concealing or neglecting a judgment which can be found in an existing book—not an action of textual alteration.[170]

Muḥammad's exclamation that he is reviving "one of the *sunnas* of God" is also a very important indicator of meaning. The prophet of Islam is here claiming a link with God's revelations of the past. The attestation of his prophethood in this narrative is his ability to make a judgment which is contained in the Torah. His authority is measured here against the accepted authority of an earlier scripture.[171] The "proof" of his authority is that the judgment he makes is written down in the Torah and—crucially—can be read from the Torah *at that very*

[170] Concealing is also the concern of the version of this story found in Bukhārī. There it is ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām who challenges the Jews to bring the Torah and recite it, after the Jews have told Muḥammad that they find no stoning punishment for adultery in the Torah. The Jewish scholar who used to teach the Torah to the Jews puts his hand on the "verse of stoning," and proceeds to read what was above and below his hand. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām removes the scholar's hand from the page, and the Jews have to acknowledge that the verse of stoning was there in the Torah. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Al-Arabi, 1955), Vol. VIII, 213–214 (*kitāb al-tawḥīd*, bāb 51).

[171] More extensive discussion of this theme will be presented in chapter 6. In Q 2:101 and 3:81, a messenger from God confirms "what is with them." In his comments on Q 2:101, Muqātil writes that the messenger is Muḥammad, who confirms that he is the prophet and messenger "with" the Jews in the Torah. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 126. Q 3:81 refers to a covenant with the prophets in which one of the stipulations was to believe in a messenger to come who would confirm what is with them. At this verse, Muqātil again writes that the messenger is Muḥammad, and that what is "with" the Jews is the attestation of Muḥammad in the Torah. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 287.

time and place. For Muqātil to suggest at that point that the Torah in the hands of the Jews is corrupted would destroy the proof of authority which is being advanced.[172]

It is not clear why Muqātil tells the additional story of three things which only a prophet knows at this point. It seems to be triggered by his cross-reference of 5:15 and the phrase, "effacing much." One would expect the exegete to explain the phrase at Q 5:15 rather than here. Perhaps after telling one story of a test of Muḥammad's prophethood, he finds it natural to tell a second. Another possibility is that the involvement of Ibn Ṣūriyā in both stories prompts the exegete to tell them together, with the Torah expert's conversion coming at the end of one story, and his apostasy at the end of the other.

Substituting One Saying for Another

Muqātil's exegesis of the *baddala* verses is dominated by the story of the Banū Isrāʾīl entering Jerusalem at the time of Joshua. At Q 2:59 and 7:162 he understands the action of change to be the verbal substitution of one expression for another. He also mentions the alteration of the entering posture. The transgression at issue is disobedience to a divine command compounded by a mocking attitude. As noted above, Muqātil's two versions of the entering story do not agree in the details of what the wrongdoers said and did. At Q 2:111, he understands the tampering action to be the failure of the Jews of Madīna to believe in Muḥammad, in spite of the blessings which God had given to their forefathers.

[172] This conclusion seems to be supported by the fact that during the first centuries of Islam, the stoning verse story was connected with various other verses in the Qurʾān. For example, ʿAbd al-Razzāq narrates the story to explain Q 5:44 ("Surely we sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment"). ʿAbd al-Razzāq concludes his exegesis of Q 5:44 by claiming that the stoning verse story shows Muḥammad to be one of the 'surrendered prophets' who gave judgment according to the Torah. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, Vol. I, 185. In his *kitāb al-tafsīr*, Bukhārī tells the story around the words which he understands to be spoken by Muḥammad, "Bring you the Torah now and recite it, if you are truthful" (Q 3:93). *Ṣaḥiḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. V, 170 (*kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, bāb 58). What is clear from these two uses of the story is that the narrative was understood to demonstrate Muḥammad's ability to judge in accordance with a ruling in an intact Torah.

Muqātil's Understanding of the Concealment Verses

The 11 verses containing the verbs *katama*, *asarra* and *akhfā* are all understood in a similar way by Muqātil. In each case, he identifies the locus of the tampering action as the Torah. At Q 2:140 and 2:146, he mentions the Injīl as well. The actors are consistently Jews in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad, according to the exegete, and in many verses he specifies that they are particular leaders of the Jewish community in Madīna. At Q 2:140, Muqātil adds the *Naṣāra* of Najrān at the time of Muḥammad to the *Yahūd* of Madīna. The object of tampering in all but one passage is information about the prophet of Islam. The exegete claims in his comments on Q 2:146 that the focus of concealment is rather the information about the *qibla* in the Torah. At Q 5:15 and 6:91 he adds the matter of stoning to the matter of Muḥammad, and at Q 2:159 he indicates these two objects plus commandments of what is permitted and forbidden.

Muqātil writes that the Jews are concealing this information. He appears to understand all three verbs to refer to a similar action: at Q 5:15 he gives *katama* as a synonym of *akhfā*, and at Q 6:91 he glosses *akhfā* with *asarra*. The meaning of the action he pictures is qualified by the words he gives to accompany the concealing verbs. At Q 2:146 he sets *katama* in a parallel relationship with *jaḥada*, and at Q 2:159 he links *katama* with both *jaḥada* and *kadhdhaba*. At Q 2:42 and 3:71 he finds 'acknowledging' to be the opposite action to concealing. The motivation for this concealing, Muqātil writes at Q 3:73, is envy and ethnic pride. The exegete thus understands concealing to be an action of inappropriate and ill-conceived response to the truth in scripture about the prophet of Islam.

The frequency of concealing verbs in Sūras 2–7, and as a consequence the frequency of concealing explanations in the commentary, has a cumulative effect. Verbs of concealing appear more often than verbs of alteration.[173] The accusation of concealing assumes an intact text of scripture. It therefore does not fit logically with the accusation

[173] Here Watt's statement that "more is said about inventing falsehood than about concealing" is potentially misleading. "The Early Development," 51. Watt has in mind the verb *iftarā* ('invent a lie against God'), dealt with on p. 104 above. As was seen there, this verb seldom appears in a tampering context in the Qurʾān, and scholars of polemic have not connected verses containing this verb with the accusation of altering the earlier scriptures.

of falsifying the text. Such an accusation would eliminate the narrative theme of the culpability of the Jews for responding inappropriately to the truth which is in their possession.

Muqātil's Understanding of Other Tampering Verses

The theme of inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam dominates Muqātil's exegesis of verses containing the verbs *labasa, lawā* and *nasiya*. However, his interpretation of one of the *lawā* verses, Q 3:78, brings out a noteworthy statement of the accusation of textual falsification. The phrase, "twist their tongues with the book," would appear to refer to an act of verbal tampering, and Muqātil glosses it as such. But when he explains the subsequent clause in the verse, he speaks of the Torah and of the actions of erasing and writing. At Q 4:46, Muqātil takes the similar phrase "twisting with their tongues" in the direction of Jewish verbal disrespect in the presence of Muḥammad. There the context provides the words of a conversation and the parallel verb "traducing." There is no mention of tampering with a text. This leads to the conclusion that Muqātil's statement of textual falsification at Q 3:78 is triggered not by *lawā* but rather by the scriptural clause, "that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book; and they say, 'it is from God,' yet it is not from God." As noted above, this clause bears a resemblance to the wording of Q 2:79, about which the exegete also makes a statement concerning textual falsification. His understanding of Q 3:78, therefore, is influenced by his interpretation of Q 2:79.[174]

Muqātil understands verses containing *labasa* to refer to actions by Jewish leaders to confuse the Jewish community by concealing information about Muḥammad in the Torah and by giving mixed messages about how to respond to the prophet of Islam. He interprets the *nasiya* verses to mean choices by the People of the Book to disbelieve in Muḥammad in spite of the clear commandments in their scriptures to believe in him and follow him.

[174] See also the analysis of Muqātil's interpretation of Q 2:79 below, pp. 114–115.

Muqātil's Understanding of Verses Containing Expressions of Action

The scriptural expression of action which is most suggestive of an act of falsification for Muqātil is the phrase "those who write the *kitāb* with their hands" at Q 2:79. As described above, the exegete explains this expression to mean that Jewish leaders in Madīna erased the description of Muḥammad from the Torah and wrote in its place a false description which did not match the prophet of Islam. This verse contains neither the verb *ḥarrafa* nor any other verb in the Qurʾān's semantic field of tampering. Even so, it triggers for Muqātil his strongest statement of the falsification charge.

Andrew Rippin writes that among the *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports that are available for Q 2:79, virtually all centre on "the notion of the malicious alteration of Jewish scripture."[175] Attention must also be drawn to the tradition in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī which seems to relate to the wording of Q 2:79:

> ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās said, "O society of Muslims! How can you question the People of the Book, when your book which he has sent down to his prophet (PBUH) is the more recent news from God and you recite it undistorted (*yushab*); and when God has told you that the People of the Book changed (*baddala*) what God wrote, and altered (*ghayyara*) the book with their hands, then said, 'It is from God,' that they may sell it for a little price? Won't the knowledge that has come to you stop you from asking them? No, by God, we have never seen a man from them ask you about what has been sent down to you."[176]

The phrases "with their hands" and "from God, that they may sell it for a little price" are identical in scripture and tradition.[177]

It would appear that this tradition was in circulation already at the time of Muqātil, and that the similarities of wording led him to recount it in his exegesis of Q 2:79. The question which this exegesis raises is why Muqātil's citation of a strong tradition of falsification at

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[175] "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 15–16. Cf. al-Wāḥidī on Q 2:79, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 15.

[176] In the *kitāb al-shahādāt*, bāb 31. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. III, 163. The tradition repeats in slightly different wordings in the *kitāb al-tawhīd* and the *kitāb al-iʿtiṣām bi-al-kitāb wa al-sunna*. Goldziher highlighted this *ḥadīth* and called it the "*locus classicus*" of the accusation of falsification in the Tradition literature. "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 344. Schreiner also gave the tradition a prominent place. "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 593.

[177] The version of this tradition in the *kitāb al-tawḥīd*, bāb 42 has "they wrote with their hands." *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. VIII, 208.

this point appears to be so out of keeping with both the context in the commentary and his understanding of the majority of the tampering verses in the Qurʾān.[178] An answer to this question will be advanced in chapter 6 in relation to the operation of the narrative framework in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*.

The three other expressions of action bring to mind a variety of other tampering actions for the exegete. He associates "sell for a little price" with a financial motivation for concealing information about Muḥammad in the Torah or, in the case of Q 2:79, for writing falsehoods. The leaders of the Jews are consistently named as the actors, and their tampering action is part of their oppression of the "lowly people." The exegete interprets "throw behind backs" to mean a willful rejection by Jewish leaders of the authority of the prophet of Islam. Its rare occurrence is associated with tampering contexts. Finally, "inventing a lie against God" signifies for Muqātil a more general action of speaking falsely about what God has commanded in the past, or indeed speaking theological falsehood which is true blasphemy.

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[178] This is a question which Goldziher failed to pursue in his discussion of the *taḥrīf* theme in the *aḥādīth*. "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 344–5. The tradition cited above from the *kitāb al-shahādāt* seems to be the only tradition in Bukhārī about alteration of the Torah. At the same time Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* contains many traditions which tell of interactions between the Jews and Muḥammad in the narrative style of Muqātil's commentary and the *Sīra*. These other traditions seem to assume an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews. Examples from *kitāb al-tawḥīd* (bāb 51) are the version of the stoning verse story associated with Q 3:93, and the tradition which Goldziher himself quoted, "The People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and give its interpretation (*fassara*) in Arabic for the people of Islam." Vajda cited the tradition in Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal about a rabbi reading the Torah in the synagogue and stopping at the description of Muḥammad; and the story in Ibn Saʿd of Muḥammad adjuring a Jew to tell him whether his description was to be found in the Torah. "Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṯ," 92. Lazarus-Yafeh noted Ibn Saʿd's story about traditionists who read the Torah every week. "Tawrāt," 394. M.J. Kister collected a large number of traditions about the Torah from a wide variety of sources, and found general acceptance of the opinion that the Torah contains information about Muḥammad and his community. "Ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā-ḥaraja: A study of an early tradition," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 225. Numerous traditions advance specific sayings as being from the Torah and other earlier scriptures, including *Kitāb Dāniyāl*. Kister, "Ḥaddithū," 226–236. In one tradition, "Reading the Torah was made lawful by the Prophet's permission." Kister, "Ḥaddithū," 231. Traditions which report Muḥammad as saying, "neither believe nor disbelieve the People of the Book," or as forbidding ʿUmar to read or copy the Torah—though certainly reflecting ambivalence about previous scriptures—do not constitute accusations of falsification. Schreiner suggested that even when there is accusation of falsification in these traditions, it concerns interpretation rather than text. "Zur Geschichte der Polemik," 593.

Conclusion

It is clear from the analysis of Muqātil's exegesis of the tampering verses that he did not understand the verbs *ḥarrafa* and *baddala* to refer to an act of textual falsification of the earlier scriptures by the People of the Book either in the pre-Islamic past or in Madīna at the time of Muḥammad. Rather, he explains the verses containing these verbs with a variety of tampering actions which revolve around response to authority. He recounts stories of verbal alteration of divine commands from the history of the Children of Israel. He also tells stories of inappropriate Jewish response to the prophet of Islam.

Muqātil understands Q 2:79 to refer to a Jewish act of falsification of the text of the Torah. This understanding carries over into his exegesis of Q 3:78. The trigger for this interpretation is not the appearance of *ḥarrafa, baddala* or any other verb in the semantic field of tampering, but rather the phrase, "write the book with their hands" (Q 2:79). Muqātil places the action in Madīna at the time of Muḥammad's rule as part of an inappropriate Jewish response to the appearance of the prophet of Islam. According to Muqātil's understanding of these two verses, the words of the Torah which the Jews falsify are an unspecified description of Muḥammad. Muqātil does not offer a second possible object of falsification. In his exegesis of neither these nor other tampering verses does Muqātil advance a suggestion of the corruption of pre-Qurʾānic scriptures prior to the rise of Islam.

The remainder of Muqātil's interpretations of some 25 verses of tampering described in this chapter portray a variety of actions of tampering which assume intact scriptures in the hands of the People of the Book. Muqātil's preferred method of explaining these verses is clearly through narrative. He mostly tells about how the Jews of Madīna conceal the contents of the books which are with them. The concealment is largely done by remaining silent while Muslims are asking for information from the Torah, or when God has put on them the responsibility in a past covenant to announce the information about Muḥammad to the people. In fact they give mixed signals to the common people by changing their message in the course of a single day. Tampering actions also include verbal demonstrations of disrespect toward the prophet of Islam, or rejection of his authority, or refusing to follow and obey him according to the stipulations of the covenant. The Jews take the law of God so lightly that they set aside important commandments just because they lack the will to apply them. The intact text of the Torah seems to remain solidly in the background of all of these various actions of tampering.

CHAPTER FIVE

ṬABARĪ ON THE QURʾĀNIC VERSES OF TAMPERING

After Muqātil had completed his commentary on the Qurʾān around the middle of the second Islamic century, the store of exegetical traditions grew rapidly as more and more Muslim scholars entered the challenging discipline of *tafsīr*. Toward the end of the third Islamic century, Ṭabarī gathered the various opinions about the meanings of Muslim scripture into a massive collection called the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* ("The sum of clarity concerning the interpretation of the verses of the Qurʾān"). The unwieldy size of the work has prevented it from ever becoming very popular. For the scholar of Islamic origins, however, a key advantage of the commentary is its abundance of material.

Another advantage of the commentary is the felicitous arrangement of the exegetical comments, which allows the scholar to quickly locate the discussion of any particular part of any verse. Ṭabarī treats each verse of the Qurʾān separately. He first quotes the complete verse, then offers his commentary in segments according to the distinct phrases or clauses of the verse. He signals the start of a new segment with the formula, "Remarks concerning the interpretation of his [God's] saying, Almighty,"[1] after which he gives the phrase or clause from the verse.

In each segment, then, he offers a collection of opinions on that part of the verse.[2] The opinions come in the form of *ḥadīth* which are attributed to authorities of the past and connected to them in each case through an *isnād*. Ṭabarī's commentary contains more than 35,400 such traditions attested through 13,026 different chains of transmission.[3] Traditions are attributed most often to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid. Heribert Horst found that a single *isnād* leading from Muḥammad ibn Saʿd Kātib al-Wāqidī back to Ibn ʿAbbās appears some 1564 times.[4] Other authorities cited frequently—including in the

[1] Cf. Loth, "Ṭabarî's Korancommentar," 601.

[2] Calder identifies the citation of named authorities as his second structural characteristic of Qurʾānic commentary. "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 103.

[3] Horst, "Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs," 291.

[4] "Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs," 294.

passages examined in this study—are Qatāda, al-Suddī, al-Rabīʿ and Ibn Zayd. In terms of exegetes of the formative period, ʿAbd al-Razzāq is included in a number of the most common *isnāds*,[5] while al-Farrāʾ appears in the guise of Ṭabarī's Kūfan grammarian.[6]

In each segment of Ṭabarī's commentary on each verse, he groups the traditions according to different possibilities of interpretation for the phrase or clause in question. He will sometimes preface a group of traditions with the formula, "Interpreters disagree concerning the meaning of God's having said that." After presenting the views of his authorities, Ṭabarī will frequently indicate which interpretation he prefers, sometimes prefacing his views by *qāla Abū Jaʿfar*, and often by the formula, "For me, the first of these remarks in merit is...." He argues his case on the basis of parallel Qurʾānic passages, grammar, poetry, theology, lexicographical criteria, or whatever seems to work for him in the context. In one of the *ḥarrafa* passages, for example, Ṭabarī argues for one interpretation on the basis that "two men" gave it, and that both were "companions of the apostle of God."[7]

The material cited by Ṭabarī from his authorities includes a wide variety of literary types. Most often he cites glosses of words, or identification of pronouns. In many passages, including the passages of this study, Ṭabarī relays units of narrative. These narratives may be accounts of Biblical figures of the distant past, or reports of the dealings of the prophet of Islam with various groups. Sometimes a narrative tradition about the prophet will be brought in to serve as a *sabab al-nuzūl*. Norman Calder observed that Ṭabarī preferred narrative—both popular and Qurʾānic—to theological dogma.[8]

Frequently Ṭabarī will supply his own paraphrase or amplification of the verse, into which he inserts glosses and identifications cited earlier in his traditions. He offers etymological explanations or definitions of words he considers difficult or important. He frequently takes time to try to resolve evident grammatical difficulties in the verse, quoting lines of Arabic poetry as *shawāhid*. If he is familiar with variant

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[5] See the *isnād* charts of Horst, "Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs," 296, 301.

[6] Cooper, *The Commentary on the* Qurʾān, xiii.

[7] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.

[8] Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 108. Calder's observation will be tested in the description and analysis sections below.

readings on any part of the verse, he will include a discussion of the possibilities.

Scholars of *tafsīr* have noted the divergence and even the contradiction[9] within the material which Ṭabarī cites. In contrast to Muqātil's confident setting forth of a single explanation of the verse, Ṭabarī's exegesis is a polyvalent reading of Muslim scripture[10]—offering not only differing interpretations but open disagreement among the chosen authorities.[11] The interpretation he prefers may or may not have the support of a traditional authority; his opinion may not appear to be based in any way on historical criticism. At times he may bring in quite sophisticated discussions of dogmatics or law.[12] But what is Ṭabarī's role in the selection and presentation of this diverse material?

Charfi suggests that the plurality of interpretations offered by the exegete create an impression in the reader's mind, "seeking to influence his feelings rather than to provide any intellectual conviction."[13] Other scholars give Ṭabarī the creative role of an exegete-theologian.[14] He appears to have been upholding an Islamic orthodoxy of his time, and omits, for example, any reference to Muqātil, "presumably because of his tarnished reputation as a reliable source."[15] Bosworth concludes, "His own dogmatic beliefs appear to have been basically within the framework of 'orthodox' Islam as conceived, e.g. in the environment of Ibn Ḥanbal just before al-Ṭabarī's time and that of al-Ashʿarī after him."[16]

The following descriptions and analyses of Ṭabarī's exegesis of the tampering verses follow the order of chapter four: alteration verbs,

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[9] Charfi, "Christianity in the Qurʾan Commentary of Ṭabarī," 145.

[10] Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 103, cf. 121–122.

[11] Tottoli highlights this characteristic of Ṭabarī's commentary as the feature that "determined its persuasive force and its unifying power and allowed the story of salvation to take root in the collective memory of the community of believers." *Biblical Prophets*, 102.

[12] Rippin, "Al-Ṭabarī," 321.

[13] Charfi, "Christianity in the Qurʾan Commentary of Ṭabarī," 145.

[14] Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue, et théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Tabari (m 311/923)* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1990), 281. cf. Loth, "Ṭabarî ist eben nicht Historiker in unserm Sinne, sondern, wie Masʿûdî richtig bemerkt hat, Theolog—in des Wortes höchster Bedeutung." "Ṭabarî's Korancommentar," 602.

[15] Rippin, "Al-Ṭabarī," 321. Goldziher noted that Kalbī and Wāqidī were also on Ṭabarī's black list. *Richtungen*, 87, n. 6. And yet Ṭabarī makes use of Ibn Isḥāq, whose narratives are so similar to Muqātil's.

[16] Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," 12.

concealing verbs, other verbs of tampering, and expressions of action. In this chapter, however, analysis of each group of exegetical passages immediately follows description. Also, the quotation of the verses of tampering from the Qurʾān is not repeated.

Ṭabarī's Commentary on Verses of Alteration

Description: Wide Variety of Exegetical Traditions

Ṭabarī's exegesis of the *ḥarrafa* verses is examined first in this section. Again, the descriptions of the *ḥarrafa* interpretations contain greater detail because of the prominence of these verses in the lists given by scholars of Muslim polemic, as well as in the popular Muslim doctrine of scriptural corruption today. These longer descriptions also serve to demonstrate Ṭabarī's overall exegetical routine. His exegesis of the three verses containing *baddala* are then described in a more concise fashion.

Q 2:75

Ṭabarī divides Q 2:75 into four segments for his commentary.[17] He provides simple glosses for several of the phrases at the start of the verse. He identifies the unspecified pronouns "they" and "you" as the Jews and the companions of Muḥammad. He gives a grammatical explanation of the word *farīq* ('party') along with a couple of lines of poetry to exemplify its use. In the course of his commentary on the verse he brings in the views of six authorities, and offers eight *aḥādīth*, complete with *asānīd*. The exegesis also includes an example of paraphrase or amplification, in which Ṭabarī assumes the second person voice, expands on the verse, and applies it directly to the Jews at the time of Muḥammad.

Ṭabarī immediately says that the interpreters (*ahl al-taʾwīl*) disagree about the meaning of the phrase, "there is a party of them that heard God's word, and then tampered with it, and that after they had comprehended it, wittingly." According to the first view, those who tampered were the Jewish scholars (attributed to Mujāhid), and the locus of the tampering was the Torah (al-Suddī). The exegete relays a scenario from Ibn Zayd, who also saw the object of tampering as

[17] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 244–249.

the Torah. According to this scenario, the Jewish religious leaders tampered with the sanctions and prohibitions in the Torah, changing them. Whenever a person with a righteous claim came to them with a bribe, they would bring out the book of God and judge according to that authority. But if a person making a false claim brought them a bribe, they would bring out to him a second book,[18] according to which he would be judged to be in the right. If, however, a man came to them inquiring concerning a matter wherein there was neither truth nor falsehood, and did not offer a bribe, they would enjoin him to act truthfully.[19] According to Ibn Zayd's account, at this point God sent down Q 2:44: "Will you bid the people to piety and forget yourselves, while you recite scripture? Do you not understand?"

Other interpreters with whom Ṭabarī is familiar say that the Jews indicated in this verse heard the word of God "like the prophets heard," then tampered with it after hearing it (al-Rabīʿ). Ibn Isḥaq said that "they heard the word of God" cannot mean "they heard the Torah"—because all of the Jews heard the Torah. Rather, this phrase concerns those who asked Moses to see their Lord, and who were subsequently struck by lightning.

The narrative which came from "some of the learned" through Ibn Isḥaq is that the Jews said to Moses, "O Moses, something prevents us from seeing God, so make us hear his speech (*kalām*) when he speaks with you."[20] Moses then made this request of God, and God granted it. God said, "command them to purify themselves, and to purify their clothes, and to fast." The Jews did so. Then Moses went out with them as far as the mountain *al-Ṭur*. When the cloud covered the Jews, Moses commanded them to fall down prostrate. God spoke with Moses, and the Jews heard his word (*kalām*) commanding them and forbidding them. They understood what they heard. Then Moses and the Jews returned to the main community of Banū Isrāʾīl. "And when they arrived," writes Ṭabarī, "a party of them tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) what he had commanded them." Moses said to Banū Isrāʾīl, "God commanded you such-and-such," but the group of Jews indicated by "a party of them" said, "On the contrary, he said such-and-such"—in contradiction to what God had said to them.

[18] Literally "that book," *dhālika ʾl-kitāb*. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 246.
[19] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 246.
[20] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247.

Ṭabarī indicates his preference for this second interpretation of the verse—"the closest to what the ostensive reading[21] indicates." The verse concerns a group of Jews who heard his word (*kalām*) at the time of Moses. "Then they tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) that and changed (*baddala*) [it], after hearing it and knowing it and understanding it." Ṭabarī writes that in this verse God wanted to stress the gravity of the lie[22] which the Jews brought, after he had confirmed the proof (*ḥujja*) and demonstration (*burhān*) for them. Therefore, this verse notifies God's believing servants of the vanity of their hopes about "the faith of their surviving descendants in the truth, light, and guidance which Muḥammad had brought them." Here Ṭabarī provides a paraphrase or amplification of the verse:

> How do you expect these Jews to affirm your truthfulness (*taṣdīq*), when you inform them by what you tell them of the reports from God of something invisible which they have not witnessed or seen? Some of them heard from God his word (*kalām*) and his command and his prohibition, then changed (*baddala*) it and tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) it and denied (*jaḥada*) it. Those of their surviving descendants who are among you are more likely to deny (*jaḥada*) the truth you have brought them, not having heard it from God but only from you. And it is more probable that they will misrepresent (*ḥarrafa*)[23] what is in their books from the characteristics (*ṣifa*) and description (*naʿt*) of your prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), and change (*baddala*) it knowingly, and deny (*jaḥada*) it and lie (*kadhaba*), than those who were in direct contact with the word of God (*kalām allāh*) from God, exalted his praises, then tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) it after they had understood it and known it, intentional doers (*taʿammada*) of tampering (*taḥrīf*).[24]

The phrase "they heard the word of God" cannot mean "they heard the Torah," writes Ṭabarī, because both the tamperer (*muḥarraf*) and the non-tamperer among the Jews heard the Torah.[25] Rather, specific Jews who tampered with what they heard is in view in this verse. "They had been granted directly the hearing of the word of God Almighty, which he did not grant to anyone other than the prophets and apostles. Then

[21] J. Cooper for *ẓāhir al-tilāwa*. *The Commentary on the* Qurʾān, 403. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247.
[22] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247.
[23] Adang's translation in *Muslim Writers*, 228. Burton gives "distort." "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 100.
[24] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247–8.
[25] Cf. Cooper, *The Commentary on the* Qurʾān, 403, ftn.

they changed (*baddala*) and tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) what they heard from that."[26]

At the end of his commentary on Q 2:75, Ṭabarī provides an important explanation of what he understands the verb *ḥarrafa* to mean. He writes that the meaning of the scriptural phrase "then they tampered with it" is "then they changed (*baddala*) its meaning (*maʿnan*)."[27] The sense of *ḥarrafa* here is that "they bend (*māla*) its direction and meaning (*maʿnan*) to something else."[28] Ṭabarī further explains that those who tampered with the word of God fully understood that what they were reporting was contrary to the correct interpretation, and knew that by tampering with it they were uttering nonsense and lying.[29]

Therefore, concludes Ṭabarī, this verse is God's report about the boldness of the Jews to accuse, and their targeting of animosity (*ʿadāwa*) to God and to his apostle Moses in earlier times. But the verse also applies to a similar targeting of animosity by the descendents of those earlier Jews toward God and his apostle Muḥammad, out of injustice (*baghy*) and envy (*ḥasad*).[30]

Q 4:46

Ṭabarī divides Q 4:46 up into seven segments, and under each he lists the views of the interpreters on that part of the verse.[31] He offers the opinions of eight authorities in 23 *ahādīth*, almost half of them attributed to Mujāhid. His exegesis of the verse incorporates grammatical explanation, gloss, definition, identification of unspecified pronouns, attribution, short narrative, paraphrase and amplification.

He begins the passage with a long grammatical explanation of the phrase, "some of the Jews (*hādū*)." There are disparate views over whether this phrase would be more correct with *man* inserted between *hādū* and the verb *yuḥarrifūna*. He gives the views of the Arabic experts of Kūfa and Baṣra, and discusses the common usage of Arabic speakers,

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26 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 248.

27 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 248. Ṭabarī adds here in more technical language: "and its interpretation (*taʾwīl*) is 'and they change (*ghayyara*) it', and its original (*aṣl*) is derived from the deflection (*inḥirāf*) of the thing from its direction (*jiha*), which is its inclination (*mayl*) from it to other than it."

28 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249. Cf. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 229; Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 423.

29 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249. The last two words of this quote are participles of *baṭala* and *kadhaba*.

30 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249.

31 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 430–439.

giving examples from poetry and from the Qurʾān. For example, he uses Q 4:44, "have you not seen those who were given a portion from the book," to identify *hādū* as the Jews. Later in his exegesis of this verse, Ṭabarī offers a grammatical explanation of the expression *anẓurnā* ("regard us!").[32]

On the phrase, "they tamper with the words," Ṭabarī offers a definition similar to the one he offered at Q 2:75. This phrase means "they change (*baddala*) their meaning (*maʿnan*) and alter (*ghayyara*) them from their interpretation (*taʾwīl*)."[33] The exegete also gives an explanation of "out of their places," glossing it as "out of their places (*amākin*) and their meanings (*wujūh*)"[34] He notes Mujāhid's view that "words" (*kalim*) means the Torah, but says no more about this line of interpretation.

The largest part of Ṭabarī's explanation of Q 4:46 is taken up with explaining the speeches of the Jews and the words they should have said.[35] According to his description, when the Jews say, "We heard and we disobey," they mean that they heard the command of Muḥammad and they will not obey (*ṭāʿa*) him. When they say, "Hear, may you not hear," they mean they want Muḥammad to listen to them, but they will not submit to (*qabila min*) his command. The Jews used to say "*rāʿinā*"[36] in order to mock (*istahzaʾa*) Muḥammad. By using this expression they wanted to counteract (*baṭṭala*) him and accuse him of lying (*kadhdhaba*). For among the Jews, reports Qatāda, there was abomination (*qabīh*).[37]

In this section, the exegete and his chosen authorities offer a range of vocabulary to describe the tampering action which they envision. Ṭabarī writes that the Jews used to say "hear, may you not hear" in order to insult (*sabba*) the prophet of Islam and to hurt (*ādhā*) him

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[32] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 430–432.
[33] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 437.
[34] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 432.
[35] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 433–7.
[36] Ṭabarī's exegesis of *rāʿinā* comes at Q 2:104. There he cites a large number of traditions which attempt to explain this mysterious word. Some interpreters offer the gloss *khilāfan* ('in contradiction'); others gloss it *arʿinā samʿaka*, which Ṭabarī understands to mean "listen to us and we will listen to you"; yet others offer *khaṭāʾ* ("sin"). More relevant to the tampering theme is the way in which the traditions understand the word to have been pronounced: in a mocking way (*istihzāʾ*), and in an insulting way (*sabb*). *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 459–467. Künstlinger discusses Ṭabarī's explanation at Q 2:104 in "Rāʿinā," 877–879.
[37] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.

with abomination (*qabīḥ*). He cites Ibn Zayd to support the view that the Jews used this expression as an insult (*adhan*), abusing (*shatm*) the prophet and deriding (*istihzāʾ*) him.[38] The action of tampering (*taḥrīf*) with the word (*kalām*), according to Mujāhid and al-Ḥassan, is done "with their tongues"; and religion is defamed through abuse (*sabb*) of the prophet.[39] Mujāhid adds that that Jews meant to say that whatever the prophet might say would not be acceptable (*maqbūl*) to them.[40]

Ṭabarī's explanation of "twisting with their tongues" will be presented in a separate section below. The Jews would have done better, writes Ṭabarī, if after hearing the saying of Muḥammad they had pledged to obey his command. They should have accepted (*qabila*) what he brought them from God. Their honesty and straight dealing with the prophet of Islam would have been more proper for them.[41]

The last clause of the verse brings out an interesting expression from Ṭabarī, a kind of paraphrase or amplification which incorporates narrative links from outside the verse. The meaning of, "But God has cursed them for their unbelief (*kufr*), so they do not believe (*āmana*) except for a few," is:

> But God, blessed and almighty, humiliated these Jews, whose characteristics he described in this verse, and drove them away, and removed them from good sense. They sold the truth for their unbelief, meaning by their rejection (*juḥūd*) of the prophethood of his prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), and what he brought to them from his Lord of guidance and clear proofs. And so they do not believe, except a few. He says: they do not believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in Muḥammad (PBUH) and what he brought to them from his Lord, and they do not acknowledge (*qarra*) his prophethood except a few. He says: they do not believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in the truth which you brought them, O Muḥammad, except a little faith.[42]

In this closing paraphrase, the exegete's concern is with the response of the Jews to the prophet of Islam. It is their inappropriate response to the truth which Ṭabarī understands to have brought God's curse upon them. The frequency of verbs and expressions of response earlier in the passage serves further to highlight this theme. Indeed this

38 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 434.
39 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 434.
40 Cf. Ambros, "'Höre, ohne zu hören,'" 17.
41 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 436.
42 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439.

theme seems to give coherence to Ṭabarī's explanation of the tampering action in the verse.

Q 5:13

For his exegesis of Q 5:13, Ṭabarī divides the verse up into six segments. He passes on the opinions of six authorities in some 12 traditions.[43] The commentary includes grammatical explanations of the expression *fa-bimā* early in the verse[44] and "treachery" (*khāʾina*) later on.[45] It also includes a detailed discussion of the correct reading (*qirāʾa*) for *qāsiyatan* in the phrase "we made their hearts hard."[46] More importantly for the theme of this study, the passage contains an accusation of falsification of the Torah. It closes by noting a claim of abrogation of the command to "forgive"—similar to what Muqātil made, except that Ṭabarī attributes the claim to Qatāda.

Ṭabarī begins his exegesis with a strong opening statement on the covenant referred to at the beginning of the verse.[47] He understands that through this verse God is telling Muḥammad not to be surprised when the Jews cause anxiety (*hamma*), spread out their hands to him and his companions, break the covenant which is between the prophet and them, and act treacherously (*ghadara*). That is only to be expected, given the record of their ancestors with the covenant which God made with them in the past. The exegete catalogues some of the kindnesses which God showed to the Children of Israel: "I sent from them 12 chiefs who were chosen from all of them, in order to detect information about the giants, and I promised to help them, and I gave them their land as an inheritance, and their homes and their possessions, after showing them the crossing and the signs in the destruction of Pharaoh and his people in the sea, and parting the sea for them, and the walking of the crossing." But the Jews broke the covenant which they had bound with God, so he cursed them. If this is what the best Jews did in spite of God's kindness to them, asks Ṭabarī, why be surprised if their "lowly people" do the same thing?[48]

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[43] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125–135.
[44] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125. Arberry renders it "so for."
[45] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 131–2.
[46] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 126–8.
[47] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125.
[48] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125.

Ṭabarī then advances an important interpretation of the phrase, "They tamper with the words out of their places":[49]

> [God says]: We hardened the hearts of these who broke our covenants from the Children of Israel, removing from them the good, taking away from them success. They do not believe, and they are not rightly guided, and God certainly removed success and faith from their hearts. They tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) the word (*kalām*) of their Lord which he sent down upon their prophet Moses (PBUH), and it is the Torah. So they changed (*baddala*) it and wrote with their hands other than what God, exalted and powerful, sent down upon their prophet. They said to the ignorant of the people, "This is that word (*kalām*) of God which he sent down upon his prophet Moses"—(PBUH)—"and the Torah which he revealed to him." And this characterized the Jews in the centuries after Moses, some of whom reached the era of our prophet Muḥammad[50] (PBUH). But God…included them among those about whom he initiated the report from the time of Moses, since they were their descendents, and followed their way in the lie (*kadhib*) against God, and the falsehood (*firya*) against him, and the breaking of the covenants, which he made with them in the Torah.

In this passage, Ṭabarī indicates an action of tampering with the Torah itself. He specifies that the Jews changed the text and wrote something of their own invention. Then they tried to pass off this new writing as the revelation which God gave to Moses. The exegete says that this tampering action continued from the period after Moses up to the time of Muḥammad. He then follows up this long passage with a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās that the "words" indicated in the verse mean "the legal punishments (*ḥudūd*)[51] of God in the Torah."[52]

Ṭabarī's explanation of the phrase, "and they have forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of," will be presented in a separate section below. On the phrase, "and thou wilt never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them," the exegete finds both a general description and a specific situation. He

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49 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 128–9.

50 This sentence is: *wa hādha min ṣifati ʾl-qurūn allatī kānat baʿda Mūsā mina ʾl-Yahūd mimman adraka baʿḍahum ʿaṣra nabiyyina Muḥammad. Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129. Burton's translation of the whole clause: "That conduct went on from the period after Moses up to the time of Muḥammad." "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 102.

51 Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 102: "penal provisions." Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 425: "punishments specified."

52 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129 (trad. 11586).

writes that the way in which the Jews broke their covenant with God demonstrates in general their perfidy (*ghadr*) and their faithlessness (*khiyāna*). Ṭabarī cites Qatāda to the effect that the "treachery" of the Jews referred to in this verse is their faithlessness and falsehood (*kadhib*) and immorality (*fajūr*).

But there was a particular event in the life of Muḥammad when, after he approached the Jewish tribe Banū Naḍīr, they planned to murder him and his companions.[53] Ṭabarī agrees with Mujāhid and ʿIkrima in connecting the "treachery" of the verse with the day the prophet "entered their walls."[54] The prophet had wanted to ask the Jews for help concerning the blood money (*diya*) of the ʿAmarī tribe, but on the way God warned him of the Jewish tendency to cause him trouble.[55]

The commentary on Q 5:13 ends with a discussion of the divine command to pardon and forgive the Jews for their treachery. Ṭabarī paraphrases this part of the verse: "Pardon, O Muḥammad, these Jews who intend murder in spreading out their hands to you and to your companions; and forgive them their crimes, giving up the objection to their reprehensible behavior. I love whoever does good by pardoning and forgiving the one who does evil to him."[56] The exegete notes the tradition from Qatāda that this command to forgive was subsequently abrogated. Yes, said Qatāda, the prophet of Islam was to pardon and forgive as long as the command to fight had not been given. But then Q 9:29 superseded the earlier command: "Fight those who do not believe in God and the last day and do not forbid what God and his apostle have forbidden—such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled." Those intended here are the People of the Book, said Qatāda. "So God, exalted his praise, commanded his prophet (PBUH) that he fight them, until they surrender (*aslama*), or 'settle down' (*qarra*) through *jizya*."[57]

53 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133.
54 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 131–2 (trads. 11590–92).
55 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133.
56 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 134.
57 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 134–5.

Q 5:41

On Q 5:41, Ṭabarī offers a very long passage of commentary, chock full of fascinating narrative.[58] He divides the verse into five sections for his exegesis. He passes on 21 traditions which he attributes to 10 authorities, some of them substantial narratives. He includes gloss, identification of unspecified pronouns, attribution, paraphrase, amplification of scriptural phrases, definition, grammatical explanations, and narrative. The narratives, though long and detailed, will be described as fully as possible because of their importance in determining what Ṭabarī and his chosen authorities have in mind for the tampering action in this verse.

The exegete notes right at the start of his comments that the interpreters of the Qurʾān have disagreed on who is meant by this verse. Some of the interpreters say that this came down concerning Abū Lubāba ibn ʿAbd al-Mandhar. When the prophet of Islam was besieging the Jewish tribe Banū Qurayẓa, Abū Lubāba pronounced a command of "slaughter" upon them. Other interpreters say that this verse came down concerning an anonymous Jew who asked his ally from the Muslims for a ruling from Muḥammad. This Jew had killed another Jew and wanted to know what judgment the prophet of Islam would render concerning his crime. The murderer told his Muslim acquaintance that if the prophet gave a judgment of paying blood money, he would accept it. But if the prophet ruled capital punishment, he wouldn't even bring the case before him. This second interpretation emerges again later on in Ṭabarī's commentary through a tradition attributed to Qatāda.

A third group of interpreters claim, however, that the occasion of revelation for Q 5:41 was the Jew ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā and how "he apostatized after becoming a Muslim."[59] This third interpretation claims the bulk of the material provided by Ṭabarī in explanation of Q 5:41.

The first narrative which Ṭabarī offers to support the third interpretation is a tradition attributed to Abū Hurayra (Ibn Isḥāq is mentioned in the chain of transmission):[60] The religious leaders of the Jews were gathered in the house of study when Muḥammad had come to

[58] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 301–318.
[59] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 303.
[60] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 303–304 (trad. 11921).

Madīna. A married man and a married woman from the Jews had committed adultery. The religious leaders decided to bring this man and woman to Muḥammad and ask him for a judgment on their act of adultery. In this way they appointed Muḥammad arbitrator (*ḥakam*) over the two. They said among themselves, "If he judges their deed with *taḥmīm*, then obey him—for in that case he is only a secular leader (*malik*)." *Taḥmīm* is explained as flogging the guilty with a whip, blackening their faces, seating them upon donkeys, and turning their faces toward the rear of the donkeys. "But if he gives a sentence of stoning, then beware of him, because he will steal (*salaba*) what is in your hands." So they approached the prophet of Islam and said, "O Muḥammad, this married man committed adultery with this married woman. Pass judgment on the two. We have appointed you as arbitrator over them." Muḥammad then proceeded to the house of study (*midrās*) where the Jewish religious leaders were. He addressed them, "O community of the Jews, bring out to me your scholars." So they brought out ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā, known as the 'one-eyed.' Some of the Banū Qurayẓa said that they also brought out Abū Yāsir ibn Akhṭab and Wahb ibn Yahūdha. The religious leaders said, "These are our scholars." So Muḥammad questioned them until they disclosed concerning Ibn Ṣūriyā, "This is the most knowledgeable one in the Torah who remains." The prophet of Islam then coaxed Ibn Ṣuriyā, a young man known for establishing prescriptions for the Jews. Muḥammad pressed the question upon him,[61] saying, "O Ibn Ṣūriyā, I adjure you by God, and remind you of him whose hands are upon Banū Isrāʾīl: Do you know that God gave a sentence of stoning for whoever commits adultery, in the Torah?" Ibn Ṣūriyā answered, "By God yes![62] By God, O Abū al-Qāsim, they certainly know that you are a sent prophet, but they envy (*ḥasada*) you." So the prophet of Islam gave the command concerning them, and the two were stoned beside the door of his mosque among the Banū ʿUthmān ibn Ghālib ibn al-Najjār. Then Ibn Ṣūriyā disbelieved (*kafara*) after that, so God sent down, "O Messenger, let them not grieve thee that vie with one another in unbelief, such men as say with their mouths, 'We believe' but their hearts believe not."[63]

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[61] *alaẓẓa*. The editor suggests a gloss of *alaḥḥa* ("importune, pester, urge"). *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304 n. 2.

[62] *allāhumma naʿam*.

[63] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304.

Ṭabarī immediately continues his exegesis with a second narrative, a tradition attributed to al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzab:[64] A Jew who had been blackened and flogged passed by the prophet of Islam. The prophet called one of the Jewish scholars and asked him, "Do you find the legal punishment (*ḥadd*) of adultery among you thus?" The scholar answered, "Yes." But Muḥammad persisted with the scholar, "Then I adjure you by him who sent down the Torah upon Moses, do you find the legal punishment of adultery among you thus?" This time the scholar answered, "No," then added, "and if you had not adjured me in this way, I would not have told you—rather, it is stoning." The Jewish scholar explained that because of the frequent occurrence of adultery among their nobility, the Jews had given up (*taraka*) the sentence of stoning. They put another punishment in the place (*makān*) of stoning, that is blackening and flogging. In response Muḥammad declared, "O God, I am the first to revive your command, since they put it to death."

Without a break, Ṭabarī passes on a third narrative, a tradition again attributed to Abū Hurayra:[65] A Jewish man came to Muḥammad and indicated that one of the Jews had committed adultery. The Jews said among themselves: "If this prophet is sent, you know that stoning is an obligation (*farḍ*) upon you in the Torah, but you concealed (*katama*) it, and you agreed amongst yourselves about its punishment. Now we will ask this prophet, and if he gives us a legal ruling of what is an obligation upon us concerning stoning in the Torah, we gave that up (*taraka*)." Then they approached the prophet of Islam and said, "O Abū al-Qāsim, a man of ours has committed adultery. What punishment would you prescribe?" Muḥammad did not reply to them, but rather he stood up and proceeded immediately to the Jews' house of study. He found them studying the Torah carefully (*tadārasa*) together in the house of *al-midrās*. He appealed to them, "O assembly of the Jews. I adjure you by God who sent down the Torah upon Moses, what do you find (*wajada* impf.) in the Torah concerning the punishment for adultery?" They said, "We find blackening and flogging." But their rabbi at one side of the room kept quiet. When the prophet of Islam noticed his silence, he questioned the rabbi closely. The rabbi said, "By God, since you adjure us, we find their sentence to be stoning."

[64] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304–5 (trad. 11922).
[65] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306–7 (trad. 11924).

Muḥammad took the opportunity to ask the rabbi, "Who was the first to make concessions (*tarakhkhaṣa*) for you in the command (*amr*) of God?" The rabbi explained that once a Jewish king named Ibn ʿAmm had committed adultery, but was not stoned. Then later, when a commoner committed adultery, the king wanted to stone him. But the people insisted that the commoner not be stoned until the king was also stoned. "Then they agreed amongst themselves on a punishment short of stoning, and they gave up (*taraka*) stoning." In response the prophet of Islam declared, "I impose (*qaḍā*) what is in the Torah."[66] According to this tradition, this was the occasion of revelation for the entire passage Q 5:41–44.[67]

After relating these three long narratives, Ṭabarī gives his ruling on which of the interpretations he favors.[68] It is clear that a "people from the hypocrites" is in view, he writes. Yes, it is conceivable that Abū Lubāba or others still could be meant by this verse. But since Abū Hurayra and al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀrib—both companions of the messenger of God—went for the third option, the correct interpretation would be that the verse came down concerning ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā.

In summing up this interpretation, Ṭabarī offers a characterization of the people whom he understands to be guilty of the tampering action. His amplification of the first part of the verse includes the following:

> O apostle, let them not grieve you who vie with one another in rejection (*juḥūd*) of your prophethood, and the denial (*takdhīb*) that you are my prophet, from those who said, "We believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in you, O Muḥammad, that you are God's delegated apostle, and we know that for certain, through our discovery (*wujūd*) of your description (*ṣifa*) in our book."[69]

Ṭabarī supports this characterization by repeating the confession made to the prophet of Islam by Ibn Ṣūriyā: "By God, O Abū al-Qāsim, they definitely know that you are the sent prophet, but they envy (*ḥasada*) you." He adds that though these words passed the lips of Ibn Ṣūriyā, they did not match what was in his heart. Thus, Ṭabarī understands

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[66] Burton cites the specification of the Torah as an example of *taʿyīn*, seeing this as an advance on traditions about Muḥammad judging according to the 'book of God.' "Law and exegesis," 280.
[67] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306–7.
[68] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.
[69] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.

that in this verse God informed Muḥammad of what was hidden in the conscience of Ibn Ṣūriyā.

The exegete continues to characterize the Jews in glosses and paraphrases throughout his explanation of this verse. On "the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to thee," Ṭabarī finds the source of grief to be the Jews' denial (*takdhīb* and *juḥūd*) of the prophethood of Muḥammad. He writes that God describes the blameworthy (*dhamīm*) characteristics of the Jews thus:[70] their deeds are evil (*radīʾ*); they regard the prohibited as lawful; their foods are evil and their eating places vile (*danīʾ*); they accept bribes and take property illegally (*suḥt*). In fact, these Jews are "a people of falsehood (*ifk*) and lying (*kadhib*) against God, and tampering with his book."[71] Further on in his exegesis, Ṭabarī appears to characterize the Jews as fornicators (*bāghūn*).[72]

The verse itself indicates that it is "the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to thee." However, who are the two groups implied by the clause? Ṭabarī's authorities do not agree,[73] but he favors the view that it is the Jews of Fadak who do not come directly to the messenger for a ruling, and the Jews of Madīna are the "other folk" whom the Jews of Fadak listen to instead.[74]

At this point Ṭabarī gives more material on the process whereby the Jews of the past gave up the stoning penalty, attributed to al-Suddī.[75] He writes that God had sent down upon the Children of Israel the command, "When anyone of you commits adultery, stone him." The Jews did not abandon (*zāla*) this judgment until one of their nobles committed adultery. The narrative then follows the pattern of the second and third narratives above. But in this version, the Jews decide that God's ruling on adultery is "unbearable," and they agree to "modify" (*aṣlaḥa*) it. The adulterous woman's name is given here as "Busra," and it is her father who sends someone to ask the prophet of Islam for a ruling. This father also candidly reveals misgivings about the encounter

[70] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 309.
[71] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 309.
[72] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313. *bāghūn* can also mean wrongdoers, oppressors or committers of outrage.
[73] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 310.
[74] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 311.
[75] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 310–11.

with Muḥammad: "We fear that he may expose us, and tell us what we do."[76]

On the clause, "they tamper with the words out of their places," Ṭabarī provides another important explanation of his understanding of the meaning of *ḥarrafa*, to supplement what he wrote about this phrase at Q 2:75 and 4:46:

> These listeners to the lie tamper with (*ḥarrafa*)—Jewish listeners to other folk who do not come to you—*al-kalim*. Their *taḥrīf* was this: their changing (*taghyīr*) the judgment (*ḥukm*) of God, almighty his mention, which he sent down in the Torah concerning married women and married men (*muḥṣina*) of adultery by stoning, to flogging and blackening. So he said,…"they tamper with the words," meaning: these Jews; and the meaning: the judgment (*ḥukm*) of the words (*kalim*).[77]

In other words, Ṭabarī identifies the object of the tampering action as "the judgment" of the words.[78] The exegete also provides an explanation for the phrase, "from its places." He writes that this means, "after God had put them into context."[79] As for the words *min baʿd* in the phrase "from (*min baʿd*) its places," this can be taken to mean "out of (*ʿan*) its places"—which is the wording in Q 4:46 and 5:13. Ṭabarī offers an example to support this reading. He writes that when anyone says, "I came to you out of (*ʿan*) my leisure from the activity," they really intend, "after (*baʿd*) my leisure from the activity."[80]

Ṭabarī includes yet another account of the same narrative situation which he related earlier in his exegesis—this time triggered by the phrase, "If he gives you this, then take it, and if he does not give it, then beware."[81] He attributes the tradition to Ibn ʿAbbās:

A woman from the Jews committed adultery. God had given a judgment in the Torah to punish adultery with stoning. But the Jews did not want (*nafisa*) to stone her, so they said, "Hurry to Muḥammad. It might be that there will be with him concession (*rukhṣa*). If there is concession, then accept it." So they went to the prophet of Islam

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[76] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 311.
[77] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313.
[78] Burton's rendering is, "God contents Himself with saying, 'they alter words' since His listeners will realise that He means, 'they distort [the ruling conveyed by] the words.'" "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 102.
[79] Burton's translation in "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 102. Literally "after God placed that its places." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313.
[80] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313.
[81] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 315.

and asked him, "O Abū l-Qāsim, if one of our women commits adultery, what do you say concerning her?" The prophet answered, "What is the sentence (*ḥukm*) of God on adultery in the Torah?" The Jews said, "Never mind the Torah;[82] we want to know what you say." The prophet of Islam said, "Bring me your scholars in the Torah, which was sent down upon Moses." Then he adjured them, "By him who saved you from the people of Pharaoh, and by him who parted the sea, and saved you and drowned the people of Pharaoh, tell me: What is the judgment of God in the Torah concerning adultery?" They said, "His sentence is stoning." So the prophet of Islam pronounced this very ruling for the Jewish adulteress, and she was stoned.

Near the end of his exegesis of Q 5:41, Ṭabarī offers an alternate scenario in explanation of the meaning of the verse, from a tradition attributed to Qatāda. The story is about retaliation rights between the Jewish tribes of Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayẓa.[83] Whenever the Banū Naḍīr killed someone from the Banū Qurayẓa, they did not allow the Banū Qurayẓa to retaliate, but rather only gave them blood money. This was because of what the Banū Naḍīr considered as their superiority over the Banū Qurayẓa in nobility. But when the Banū Qurayẓa killed someone from the Banū Naḍīr, the Banū Naḍīr would accept nothing less than retaliation. When the prophet of Islam arrived in Madīna, the Banū Naḍīr wanted to present just such a case to Muḥammad. However, one of the hypocrites explained to them that if the one they had killed had been killed with premeditation, the prophet of Islam would inevitably award equal right of retaliation.[84] "If he accepts blood money from you, take it," advised the man. "but if not, be on your guard about him."

Ṭabarī gives one last tradition to explain what his various authorities understand the tampering action in the verse to be. According to a saying attributed to Ibn Zayd, "they tamper with the words out of their places" means "they do not impose (*waḍaʿa*) what God sent down."[85]

However, the exegete continues up to the end to highlight the character of the tamperers. In his comments on "Whomsoever God

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[82] Burton's translation in "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 102. Literally, "We called from the Torah."

[83] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 315–316 (trad. 11937).

[84] This expression from Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 104. Cf. *idem.*, "Law and exegesis," 281.

[85] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 316 (trad. 11938).

desires to try, you cannot avail him anything with God," Ṭabarī for a third time specifies the sin of the Jews and hypocrites as their denial (*juḥūd*) of the prophethood of Muḥammad.[86] Further, "Those whose hearts God desired not to purify," are polluted by "the filth (*danas*) of unbelief and the stain (*wasakh*) of shirk." For such people, writes the exegete, God desires only degradation (*khizy*) in this world—"that is humiliation (*dhull*) and despicableness (*hawān*)"—and in the world to come the eternal chastisement of hell.[87]

Q 2:59 and 7:162

Ṭabarī's interpretation of Q2:59 is a continuation of his exegesis of the preceding verse and the narrative situation set up there. God commanded the Children of Israel to pronounce a certain word when they entered a town (Q 2:58). At Q 2:59, Ṭabarī's exegesis is mainly taken up with the saying and entering posture which the Children of Israel substituted in place of what God had commanded them.[88]

The exegete immediately glosses *baddala* with *ghayyara*, and writes that this verse is concerned with the *tabdīl* and *taghyīr* which the Children of Israel committed. Then he offers 17 traditions which attempt to identify the substitution. The first of these traditions is traced back to Muḥammad.[89] Here the Children of Israel entered the gate crawling on their backsides instead of bowing prostrate. And instead of saying *ḥiṭṭa* as they were commanded, they said *ḥibba fī shaʿīra*, "seeds on a piece of hair."[90] Other traditions assert that the substituted expression was "wheat on a piece of hair" (*ḥinṭa fī shaʿīra*), or even "red wheat." The most elaborate description of the Jewish saying is in a tradition attributed to Ibn Masʿūd.[91] It purports to give a transliteration of the actual sounds the Children of Israel made, *haṭā samqā yā azba hazbā*, because it then gives its meaning "in Arabic": "a grain of red wheat pierced with a black hair." Variations of the improper posture include entering on the backside while shielding the face.[92]

[86] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 316.
[87] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 318.
[88] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 112–119.
[89] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 112 (trad. 1019).
[90] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 112 (trad. 1019).
[91] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 114 (trad. 1029).
[92] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 115 (trads. 1030, 1031).

Ṭabarī's traditions also add some explanations to qualify the substitution action. When they said *ḥinṭa*, they were "mocking" (*istahzaʾa*).[93] A tradition attributed to Ibn Zayd specifies that they were mocking Moses.[94] Later in his exegesis of the verse, Ṭabarī characterizes the action of the Children of Israel as disobedience (*maʿṣiya*).[95]

At Q 7:161–2, Ṭabarī again highlights the Children of Israel's "disobedience" (*ʿiṣyān*) of Moses.[96] In explaining this second occurrence of the verses, the exegete does not repeat the traditions he gave earlier, but rather simply supplies one possibility for the substituted saying—"wheat on a piece of hair"—and refers the reader to his citations at Q 2:59.[97] Here again *ghayyara* is given as a gloss for *baddala* and explained as an action of verbal substitution. In neither passage does Ṭabarī mention the Torah or any other book.

Q 2:211

At Q 2:211, the scriptural object of the verb *baddala* is "God's blessing." Ṭabarī interprets "blessing" as "Islam, and what he required from the law of his religion."[98] To change God's blessing means to alter (*ghayyara*) what God covenanted with the Children of Israel concerning Islam, and its practice and the entrance into it. Ṭabarī understands the covenant with the Jews to include information about the prophet of Islam and what he brought, that he is God's prophet and apostle. This covenant was in the book of the Children of Israel. But the response of the Jews was that they disbelieved (*kafara*) in all of this.[99]

In making this interpretation, Ṭabarī seems to have followed a series of traditions which he cites about the meaning of *baddala*. Traditions attributed to Mujāhid, al-Suddī and al-Rabīʿ all interpret "change God's blessing" as to "disbelieve" in it.[100] Ṭabarī also includes in this short passage his own paraphrase of the verse's challenge to the Children of Israel: "O you who believe in the Torah, and trust in it. Come into Islam one and all!"[101]

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93 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 114 (trad. 1025).
94 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 115 (trad. 1033).
95 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 116, 119.
96 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 178.
97 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 179.
98 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272.
99 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272.
100 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 273 (trads. 4042, 4044 and 4045).
101 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272.

Analysis: Emphasis on Failure to Apply the Torah

Ṭabarī offers a joyful abundance of material in explanation of the *ḥarrafa* and *baddala* verses. In comparison to Muqātil, he develops the meaning of the verses in a much wider variety of ways. Like Muqātil, Ṭabarī provides gloss or substitution for terms within the verse, and offers narration of actions which are to explain the words of scripture. A major difference, however, is the multiplicity of perspectives which Ṭabarī supplies in the form of traditions attributed to his chosen authorities. The exegete also gives significant definitions of terms central to this study, stopping to tender grammatical or etymological suggestions which Muqātil evidently passed over. Ṭabarī sets up relevant scriptural verbs in parallel or in association with other verbs, and offers yet further information through the objects he attaches to key verbs.

Verbal Changes of Interpretation

On Q 2:75, Ṭabarī takes a stand with the interpreters who understand the verse to refer to the account of the Children of Israel who asked to see God at the time of Moses. He does indeed relay Ibn Zayd's story about "two books," but when he states his preference, he makes an argument against that story developing the meaning of *ḥarrafa* in the verse. In Q 2:75, *kalām Allāh* for Ṭabarī is not the Torah, and though he does list this opinion early on, he later explicitly rejects this option. The description of the tampering action itself differs from the story which Muqātil told in that the group of Jews concerned reported to the people something which contradicted what God had commanded. In any case, the tampering action for Ṭabarī is not the alteration of a text, but rather the perversion of the speech of God which a group of Israelites heard at the time of Moses.

Ṭabarī also provides important etymological information about his understanding of the meaning of the verb *ḥarrafa*. He uses strong verbs of alteration (*baddala*, *ghayyara*) in his definition, but says that the change which took place was in the meaning and interpretation of the words of God. He also offers a pair of synonyms in his definition: *ḥarrafa* is explained by *māla*, and *mayl* renders *inḥirāf*.

There is therefore no suggestion here that the verse refers to a corrupted text of scripture, or that the verbal tampering of a group of Jews at the time of Moses entered into the text which resulted from God's revelation to Moses. However, Ṭabarī does indeed take full advantage

of the Moses-era story to make a case for the obstinate response of the Jews at the time of Muḥammad. He strongly suggests that if a group of Jews in Moses' time heard the word of God himself and deliberately changed it, the Jews of Madīna would be even more likely to deny the preaching of the prophet of Islam. Even beyond that, they will likely be ready to tamper with the material in their scripture which refers to Muḥammad.

In casting this aspersion, Ṭabarī seems to place *ḥarrafa* in parallel with the verb *baddala* as well as with verbs of response like *jaḥada* and *kadhdhaba*. This seems to indicate an elasticity in the meaning of both *ḥarrafa* and *baddala*. To this may be added the gloss of *baddala* as *ghayyara* at Q 2:211, along with its multiple gloss there as *kafara*. These two verbs would seem to be able to encompass a variety of actions which could be included in the larger concept of 'tampering.' Certainly at Q 2:59, 2:75 and 2:211 Ṭabarī does not connect any of the verbs of alteration with textual falsification.

Ṭabarī's interpretation of *baddala* at Q 2:59 and 7:162 is similar to his understanding of *ḥarrafa* at Q 2:75 in the sense that he understands the tampering action in both *baddala* verses to be that of verbal distortion.[102] And at Q 2:211, his understanding of *baddala* is similar to Muqātil's exegesis of unbelief in Muḥammad.[103] This points toward meanings of *baddala* and *ḥarrafa* which are related to the response of the Jews to the prophet of Islam.

A Twist of the Tongue

On Q 4:46, Ṭabarī develops the meaning of the verse largely with reference to the speech of certain Jews which seems to be alluded to in the verse itself. He reinforces the definition of *ḥarrafa* which he gave at Q 2:75, that the change (*baddala*, *ghayyara*) which is taking place is in the meaning and interpretation.[104] He also provides a helpful gloss for "out of their places," explaining it with an alternate word for

102 Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 228.

103 Burton seems to claim that when Ṭabarī writes at Q 2:211 that the Jews must not alter the covenant concerning Muḥammad in their book, the exegete is referring to an act of textual falsification: "At this point, *kitmān* has finally been transmuted into outright *taḥrīf*." "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 105. But as we have seen, the context in the commentary emphasizes unbelief instead. The mistake is thinking that verbs of alteration always indicate material change.

104 Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 424.

"places" and with "meanings." Ṭabarī notes the opinion of Mujāhid that the locus of tampering is the Torah, but he does not pursue this line of thought. Instead, he proceeds to explain a verbal action of tampering.

That action, the speech of some Jews, is explained by a series of glosses, often supplied by the exegete's selected traditions. Along with the glosses come attributions of motive on the part of the Jews. The Jews make a deliberate choice, after hearing the command of the prophet of Islam, not to obey him. They insult and abuse him. They mock Muḥammad and slander his religion. They oppose him and 'give the lie' to him.

In all of this, the Jews are "twisting with their tongues." The tampering action which Ṭabarī envisions is a movement with their tongues to change meaning and show disdain for the truth of the prophet. The exegete further develops this picture with his explanation of what would have been more appropriate for the Jews to say and do. The Jews should have chosen to obey the command of Muḥammad, and should have accepted what he brought to them as from God. In his final summing up of the thrust of the verse, Ṭabarī asserts that the Jews have earned God's curse by their denial or rejection of the prophethood of Muḥammad. The prophet brought them guidance and clear proofs, but most of the Jews chose to neither believe in nor acknowledge his prophethood.

The richness of the vocabulary of response in this passage creates a strong impression that Ṭabarī found the meaning of *ḥarrafa* here to be the way the Jews of Madīna spoke with the prophet of Islam. He offers three verbs for "to insult" or "to mock" (*sabba, ādhā* and *istahzaʾa*) along with their matching nouns (*sabb, adhan* and *istihzāʾ*). He further gives two nouns of abuse and disdain (*shatm* and *istikhfāf*). To characterize the actions of the Jews he uses two strongly negative terms (*makrūh* and *qabīha*). The term *juḥūd* ("rejection") appears in his paraphrase to signify the response of the Jews to the prophethood of Muḥammad. The proper response would have been to accept (*qabila*) his authority and to acknowledge (*aqarra*) his prophethood. The exegete is clearly concerned to safeguard the respect which, in his view, the prophet deserves. This concentration of expressions of response may also be taken as an indication of a larger concern for Ṭabarī beyond the tampering motif—which may in turn influence his development of the motif.

They wrote something else with their hands

Out of his four commentary passages on the *ḥarrafa* verses, Ṭabarī makes his strongest sustained accusation of the alteration of a text of scripture in his exegesis of Q 5:13. He sees this tampering action as part of a larger scenario of Jewish faithlessness both to the covenant which God had made with them, and to the agreements they had with the Muslims.

Ṭabarī writes that Jewish leaders changed the Torah and "wrote with their hands" something other than what God had revealed. They then passed this new writing off as the very word of God which he had revealed to Moses. The wording of Ṭabarī's charge that the Jews wrote something which they pretended was the Torah is identical to the scriptural wording of Q 2:79, and resembles the wording of Q 3:78. The exegete claims that this was the practice of the Jews in the period after Moses and up to the time of the prophet of Islam. Ṭabarī cites no other authority for this interpretation, but rather appears to give these views as his own. Here he makes no mention of changing interpretation or verbal word-play.[105] Later he brings in a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās to specify that the "words" which the Jews "tampered with…out of their places" were the legal punishments of God in the Torah.

If this is an accusation of falsification of the Torah, it is not clear why Ṭabarī chooses to make this charge only at Q 5:13, when the same phrase, "tampering with words out of their places" also appears at Q 4:46 and 5:41. At 4:46 he found the tampering action to be "with the tongue." At Q 5:41 he portrays the tampering action as a failure to enforce a Torah command. He gives no indication in those passages of the accusation of textual alteration.

[105] However, Abdullah Saeed writes that Ṭabarī seems to understand the change of text to be through false interpretations, writing down those interpretations, and then claiming they are from God. If there is the possibility of tampering with either text or meaning at Q 5:13, Saeed suggests that the commentary leans toward change of meaning "in the form of attributing false interpretations to God." "The Charge of Distortion," 425.

Relaxing the Application of a Torah Command

The four extended narratives which Ṭabarī offers in his exegesis of Q 5:41 provide an understanding of what he has in mind for the tampering action referred to in the verse. He presents the same basic story which Muqātil offered, but he adds information about the method of the Jewish action and the reasons for it. Though the exegete makes note of two other possibilities for the occasion of revelation of the verse, he indicates his preference for the stoning narrative both explicitly and by the abundance of material he devotes to it.

The first narrative establishes the basic outlines of the tampering action. The Jewish religious leaders are hoping for a lenient sentence on a couple from their midst who have committed adultery. They appoint Muḥammad as an arbitrator, but at the same time create a test of his true status. Muḥammad outwits the religious leaders by determining the identity of their best Torah scholar, and by swearing that scholar to honesty. The scholar, Ibn Ṣūriyā, affirms the sentence of stoning on adultery contained in the Torah. He adds that the Jews know about the status of Muḥammad, that he is a prophet sent by God, but they won't acknowledge the truth because they envy him. The tampering action in this story is that though the punishment for adultery is clearly spelled out in the Torah, the Jewish religious leaders do not disclose it and do not want to apply it.

The second narrative dispenses with the test of prophethood and the religious leadership, but brings in an unnamed Jewish scholar for questioning. This scholar too will not tell the truth about the punishment for adultery until he is adjured by his God. But when Muḥammad adjures him, he not only affirms the stoning penalty but explains how a different sentence came to be applied. The frequency of adultery among the Jewish nobility led the people to give up the harsh sentence. They agreed to put a different punishment in the place of stoning, and eventually came to apply a more lenient sentence to noble and common adulterers alike. The exclamation of Muḥammad in this account is instructive: he claims to be the first to revive a Torah command which the Jews have stopped applying. The tampering action in this narrative is that the Jews give up the application of the sentence for adultery specified in the Torah, and that they replace it with their own sentence.

The third narrative includes the test of prophethood and gives the added information that the Jews—prior to approaching Muḥammad—

were fully aware of the stoning punishment in the Torah, but chose to conceal the verse and to give up its application. In place of Ibn Ṣūriyā is the silent rabbi at the side of the Jewish house of study. Only this single Jew responds to the adjuration of Muḥammad and admits that they find the sentence of stoning in the Torah. The prophet of Islam asks for the history of the relaxation of this obligation, and learns that it started with the adultery of a specific king of the Jews. Because the king was not stoned, the sentence could not be applied to a common adulterer either, and so the Jews agreed among themselves on a more lenient punishment. After hearing this history, Muḥammad claims to be imposing a penalty that is in the Torah. The tampering action in this narrative is that the Jews conceal what they know is in the Torah, relax the application of the stoning penalty, agree on another sentence in its place, and give up the Torah punishment.

The fourth narrative also does away with the test of prophethood, and simply presents the Jews as wanting Muḥammad to give a more lenient judgment than stoning. An interesting difference here is that only a woman is taken in adultery. The account indicates at the start that God had given the sentence of stoning in the Torah. When the prophet of Islam asks the Jews about this Torah ruling, they want to avoid that matter and to rather hear his own judgment. But Muḥammad summons the "scholars in the Torah" and asks them about the ruling. They answer without prevaricating that God's ruling is stoning. The tampering action in this account is that though the ruling on adultery is clear from the Torah, the Jews do not want to apply it. They want leniency and that is why they involve the prophet of Islam. They want to bypass what they already know from the Torah.

A striking feature of all of these traditions is that they rely for their narrative dynamic on the existence of a character who knows the Torah well. It may be Ibn Ṣūriyā in particular, the "greatest Torah scholar left"; it may be the honest rabbi at the side of the study house; it may be an unnamed scholar whom Muḥammad summons to the scene; or it may even be a group of Jewish scholars. In all four accounts, it is the Jewish scholar who is the source of the affirmation that the punishment for adultery in the Torah is stoning. There is no Gabriel in these narratives to whisper into the ear of the prophet of Islam. Rather, the prophet asks the Torah scholar, "what do you find in the Torah?" regarding the punishment for adultery, and then persists in extracting an honest reply. Indeed, in terms of the narrative, the only

way to confirm that the Torah contains the stoning punishment is to find out from a Torah scholar.

The straightforward conclusion to draw from this is that the tampering action which Ṭabarī and his traditions envisioned involves an intact Torah and a scholar who knows its contents well. The exegete does not make an explicit statement about the condition of the Torah one way or another. In other parts of his commentary he has referred to the Jews writing a *kitāb* other than the Torah, or has passed on accusations of adding to and subtracting from the Torah. But at Q 5:41 at least, the narrative pull of these four stories provides the main clue for the meaning of *taḥrīf*. The variety of verbs which the exegete and his traditions employ to characterize the tampering action in relation to the stoning punishment is striking: to give up (*taraka*),[106] make concessions (*tarakhkhaṣa*),[107] abandon (*zāla*),[108] ameliorate (*aṣlaḥa*)[109] and desist (*nafisa*).[110]

The punch line of these accounts is that the prophet of Islam passes a test of prophethood which the Jews set up for him. In two of the accounts, Muḥammad triumphantly proclaims that he is reviving a Torah command. In order for the narrative to gather to its conclusion of the authority of the prophet of Islam, there must come a confirmation that the judgment he gives matches the judgment of the Torah. That comes in these accounts from a Jewish scholar who knows what is in the Torah at hand.

Other parts of Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 5:41 appear to confirm this conclusion. In his amplification of the phrase "they tamper with words from their places," the exegete specifies that the change took place in the "judgment" or "sentence" of the words which God revealed in the Torah. Ṭabarī appears to be making a distinction between the words of the Torah and the application of the stoning punishment. He gives no indication that he understands a change in the words of the Torah text itself.[111] Rather, a concept of an intact text would match the narrative element that the Jews in the past abandoned the application of a punishment they considered to be too harsh.

[106] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.
[107] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.
[108] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 311.
[109] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.
[110] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 315.
[111] Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 426.

In other paraphrases, the exegete appears to devote his attention to characterizing the Jews in their actions of the past and in their present response to the prophet of Islam. His vocabulary highlights their rejection and denial of the prophethood of Muḥammad, based on envy. Along with this Ṭabarī offers a variety of pejorative epithets aiming to portray the Jews as dishonest, wicked, immoral and filthy. These extra pieces seem to support the narrative thrust of the four stoning accounts. The failure of the Jews to apply a judgment of God which they know is in the book which he has revealed is just one more proof of their unaccountable obstinacy.

Ṭabarī's Commentary on the Verses of Concealment

Description: Hiding Information About Muḥammad

Ṭabarī interprets the 11 verses of concealment to mean, in general, that the People of the Book have hidden information about the prophet of Islam which they find in the books in their possession. The information about Muḥammad is referred to by a variety of terms such as his *amr* and his *ṣifa*. Sometimes Ṭabarī suggests motivations for the concealment, such as unbelief, fear and greed. In some passages he indicates larger associated responses, such as refusal to obey God or the prophet of Islam. Among the noticeable differences to the methodology of Muqātil is the way that Ṭabarī will eagerly take up the grammatical questions first, for example the lack of *lā* in the second part of Q 2:42.[112] Ṭabarī discusses variant readings, for example for "you put it (*tajʿalūnahu*)" at Q 6:91.[113] He is also much less likely than Muqātil to name particular human characters as subjects of the action.

Because of his citation of multiple traditions, Ṭabarī's exegesis offers a variety of options for subject, locus and object of tampering. The largest circle of actors is at Q 5:15: "All the People of the Book from the Jews and Christians who lived during the time of the apostle of God."[114] The most frequent subject is the Jews. "The Jews and the Christians" are specified as the tamperers at Q 2:140 and 2:146. At

112 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 569. For al-Farrāʾ, the lack of *lā* in the second part of the verse was evidently the only exegetical question worth pursuing. *Kitāb maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Vol. I, 33–34.

113 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 526.

114 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 140.

Q 2:42, 2:159 and 2:174 it is their religious leaders and scholars in particular who are in view.

Ṭabarī and his traditions indicate "the Torah and the Injīl" as the locus of tampering in seven of the 11 verses. At Q 2:174, 5:15 and 6:91 the Torah alone is mentioned. At Q 2:159, 3:71 and 4:37 he finds a third locus indicated: the books which God sent down to the prophets of the Jews.[115]

In Ṭabarī's commentary, 10 of the 11 concealing passages indicate that it is the 'matter' or 'description' of Muḥammad which is being concealed. Indeed, it is virtually the only object of concealment in eight of the passages. At Q 2:159, Ṭabarī adds to the matter of Muḥammad "the soundness of his *milla*, and his truth."[116] He finds the mention of "Islam" in the former scriptures to be an object of concealment in six of the verses,[117] often in tandem with Muḥammad. Two of the passages connect the name of Muḥammad to a covenant which God made with the Children of Israel to make Muḥammad's matter clear to the people, that he is "God's messenger sent with the truth." Other objects of concealment in Ṭabarī's commentary are the Torah's true testimony about the identity of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes (at Q 2:140),[118] and the information about the *qibla* (at Q 2:146).[119]

The exegesis of Q 5:15 seems to be out of step with the other passages as far as the object of tampering is concerned. There Ṭabarī indicates only "the stoning of married adulterers."[120] In support of this object he offers a narrative, yet another version of the stoning story. When the Jews asked Muḥammad about stoning, he flushed out the "most knowledgeable" and adjured him to honesty. Ibn Ṣūriyā explains in this version that so many Jews had to be killed from the application of the stoning punishment that they "reduced" the punishment to flogging.[121] Ṭabarī brings in this story as the *sabab al-nuzūl* of the phrase in Q 5:15, "People of the Book, now there has come to you our mes-

[115] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 249; Vol. VI, 506; Vol. VIII, 354; respectively. At Q 2:77, Ṭabarī simply indicates "their books." Vol. II, 256.

[116] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 249.

[117] at Q 2:140, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 125, 126; at Q 2:159, Vol. III, 250; at Q 2:174, Vol. III, 328; at Q 3:71, Vol. VI, 506; at Q 3:187, Vol. VII, 460 (that it is the religion of God which is imposed on his servants); at Q 4:37, Vol. VIII, 352.

[118] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 124.

[119] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 187f.

[120] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 141.

[121] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 142.

senger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the book."[122]

A remarkable feature of Ṭabarī's exegesis of the verses of concealment is the frequency of occurrence of the phrase, "they find him written (*maktūb*) with them (*ʿindahum*) in the Torah and the Gospel."[123] The phrase appears 12 times in this exact wording, plus once indicating the Torah alone; and it appears 15 times in similar expressions, such as "they find him written with them."[124] Only two of Ṭabarī's 11 concealing passages do not contain such a phrase.[125]

In his exegesis of the verses of concealing, Ṭabarī does not introduce etymological explanations which help distinguish the individual meanings of the three verbs. Rather, he seems to understand all three verbs to have a similar sense. At Q 2:77, he glosses *asarra* with *akhfā*.[126] At Q 5:15, he glosses *akhfā* with *katama*,[127] and his cross-reference of Q 2:76 there makes an indirect connection to *asarra* at Q 2:77. Then at Q 6:91, he glosses *akhfā* with both *asarra* and *katama*.[128]

An interesting aspect of Ṭabarī's exegesis of two of the *katama* verses is that he brings the verbs *ḥarrafa, ghayyara* and *baddala* into his interpretations. At Q 2:174, he writes that the Jews used to gain a "little price" for their "*taḥrīf* of the book of God."[129] He immediately explains that he means, "their interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of it toward other than its intent (*wajh*), and their concealing of the truth." Further on in the same passage, Ṭabarī repeats that this verse is about those who tamper with (*ḥarrafa*) the signs of God, "and alter (*ghayyara*) their meaning (*maʿānī*)."[130] At Q 3:187, it is similarly the expression "sell for a little price" which seems to trigger the use of verbs of alteration. The Jews gained an advantage by hiding the truth "and their *taḥrīf* of the book."[131] In this clause, Ṭabarī seems to have placed the verbal nouns *kitmān* and *taḥrīf* in parallel. Further on in the passage, Ṭabarī

[122] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 142. Ṭabarī also cross references Q 2:76 at this point: "And when they go privily one to another, they say, 'Do you speak to them of what God has revealed to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord?'"
[123] This is the same wording as the Qurʾānic phrase at Q 7:157.
[124] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 257 (at Q 2:77).
[125] At Q 5:15 and 6:91.
[126] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 256.
[127] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 141
[128] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 526
[129] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 328.
[130] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 329.
[131] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464.

explains the "evil" of the Jews' transaction with another clause of parallel verbal nouns: "their squandering (*taḍyīʿ*) of the covenant, and their *tabdīl* of the book."[132]

Analysis: Actions of Inappropriate Response

Ṭabarī's use of verbs of alteration in the exegesis of *katama* verses raises the question of the meanings of the tampering verbs in his mind. It does not seem logical to conclude that Ṭabarī understands an action of alteration from a concealment verb. The other possibility is that there is room in his understanding of *ḥarrafa* for an action of concealing. Whether or not this is the case, the overall impression on reading the exegesis of the concealing verses is that the commentator is preoccupied with a variety of Jewish responses to Muḥammad, most of them negative. There is the clear sense that the Jews know/recognize/understand the truth but are responding to the truth wrongly: they are abandoning and intentionally disobeying what God commanded;[133] neglecting to follow Muḥammad;[134] refusing to tell what they know;[135] deliberately choosing to disbelieve;[136] and, frequently, denying the authority of Muḥammad.[137] These are the actions which Ṭabarī and his traditions see behind the Jewish concealment of their scriptures. The exegete's use of the imperfect with these actions ('you know,' 'you find') heightens the sense of a continuing crime of inappropriate response. One of the concealment verses suggests the motivation for concealing in a verb of greed, *bakhila* (at Q 4:37). Most of Ṭabarī's traditions interpret this to be stinginess with the truth about Muḥammad,[138] but a tradition attributed to Ibn Zayd finds it to mean Jewish avarice "with what God gave them of income."[139]

The frequency of concealment verses in Sūras 2–6 of the Qurʾān, and thus the substantial amount of material on concealment from Ṭabarī and his traditions, exerts an influence on the development of the tampering motif in the commentary. Indeed, even in his exege-

[132] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464.
[133] at Q 2:146. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 189.
[134] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 189.
[135] at Q 2:159. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 250.
[136] at Q 3:71. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 506.
[137] at Q 2:77. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 256 (trad. 1350); at Q 3:187, Vol. VII, 459.
[138] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 350–354.
[139] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 352.

sis of *ḥarrafa* at Q 5:41, concealment is the main action in focus.[140] Concealment of information about Muḥammad and other matters implies true content in an intact text of scripture. This understanding will tend to prod the commentator to moderate accusations of textual corruption.[141]

A striking similarity in Ṭabarī's exegesis of the concealment verses with Muqātil's exegesis of the same is in what the two exegetes consider to be at the heart of the matter. For these exegetes, Muḥammad is God's apostle and prophet to all people.[142] What he brought is from God. The covenant which God took with the Children of Israel stipulates that they believe in Muḥammad and what he brought, and obey him. The Jewish leaders know this information from the Torah and bear a special responsibility to make this clear to the common people. "From the Muslim perspective, as reflected in the entire body of *tafsīr*, here was the evidence of the major sin of the Jewish rabbis, summed up in the term *kitmān*: the knowledge of the true status of Muḥammad while concealing that fact in order to mislead the entire community."[143]

Ṭabarī's Commentary on Other Verses of Tampering

Description: Dishonesty with God's Revelation

Ṭabarī's interpretations of the verses containing the verbs *lawā, labasa* and *nasiya* encompass a variety of actions of tampering which range from inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam to falsification of the book of God.

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140 Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 427.

141 Adang draws attention to an example of moderation in Ṭabarī's exegesis of one of the concealment verses, Q 6:91. He first cites a tradition attributed to Saʿīd ibn Jubayr which identifies the Jewish rabbi Mālik ibn al-Ṣayf as the one who said the scriptural words, "God has not sent down aught on any mortal." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 521–22 (trad. 13535). But the exegete indicates his preference for another interpretation which finds the reference to be to the hypocritical Qurayshites instead—because the Jews do not deny God's revelations. On the contrary, writes Ṭabarī, the Jews "acknowledge (*iqrār*) the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham and Moses, and the *zabūr* of David." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 524–5. *Muslim Writers*, 230.

142 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 572 (on Q 2:42).

143 Rippin, "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 3.

Twisting

In his interpretation of Q 3:78, Ṭabarī and his *ahl al-taʾwīl* make use of a trio of verbs which indicate an action of adding something to the book of God.[144] Those who "twist their tongues with the book" were the Jews who lived "around the city of God's apostle in his era." Ṭabarī glosses "they twist" as "they tamper (*ḥarrafa*)."

> The Jews twist their tongues with the book, in order that you think that what they misrepresent (*ḥarrafa*) in their speech is from the book of God and his revelation. God says, powerful and exalted: but that which they twist their tongues with and misrepresent (*ḥarrafa*) and tell, is not from the book of God—pretending as they twist their tongues with *taḥrīf* and falsehood (*kadhib*) and deception (*bāṭil*). So they add (*alḥaqa*) it to the book of God.... That with which they twist their tongues, and tell, is not from what God sent down to any of his prophets. Rather, they tell what is from themselves, inventing (*iftarā*) against God.[145]

Ṭabarī uses the verb *alḥaqa* a second time in explaining "they speak falsehood against God, and that wittingly." He understands this to mean that they intentionally (*taʿammada*) speak a lie against God, and bear false witness against him, and "add (*ilḥāq*) to the book of God what is not from him."[146]

The traditions which the exegete cites continue in a similar vein. A tradition attributed to Qatāda finds that the Jews "tamper with the book of God, and introduce something new (*ibtadaʿa*) into it, pretending that it is from God."[147] A second tradition connected with Ibn ʿAbbās says that the Jews used to "add (*zāda*) in the book of God what God did not send down."[148]

Later in his exegesis of Q 3:78, Ṭabarī explains the original meaning of *layy* as "twisting (*fatla*) and reversal (*qalb*)."[149] Then at Q 4:46, Ṭabarī explains the action of "twisting with their tongues" as "a movement (*taḥrīk*) from them with their tongues," changing the meaning of a speech toward what is reprehensible (*makrūh*). The Jews did this

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[144] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 535.
[145] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 535. Cf. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 229.
[146] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 535–6.
[147] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536, (trad. 7292).
[148] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536, (trad. 7294). Cf. Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 428.
[149] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 537.

to show disdain (*istikhfāfan*) for the truth of the prophet.[150] Ṭabarī further explains at Q 4:46 that "twisting with the tongue" means tampering (*ḥarrafa*) with meaning (*maʿnā*).[151] He then cites a number of traditions which emphasize the aspect of mocking (*istahzaʾa*) and slandering (*ṭaʿana*).[152] A tradition from Ibn Zayd adds a verb to extend this aspect: the Jews twist with their tongues in order to "counteract" (*baṭṭala*) the religion.[153]

Confounding

At Q 2:42, Ṭabarī immediately glosses *labasa* with *khalaṭa*. But then he seems to sit back and to take a leisurely approach to the phrase, "and do not confound the truth with falsehood."[154] Someone may wonder, writes the exegete, how disbelievers (*kuffār*) could have any truth to confound. In reply, Ṭabarī explains that the situation is one of hypocrisy. In public, the Jews display belief in Muḥammad, but actually they are concealing (*istabṭana*) unbelief in him.[155] They say that Muḥammad is a prophet who has been sent; they openly acknowledge (*iqrār*) him and what he brought. However, they conceal what they really think: though they aver (*aqarra*) that he was sent to others, they deny (*jaḥada*) that he was sent to them. In reality, claims Ṭabarī, God sent the prophet of Islam to the entire creation.[156] This is how disbelievers can mix the truth with falsehood.

Ṭabarī refers to this earlier explanation when he exegetes Q 3:71.[157] There he repeats that the People of the Book publicly attest to (*taṣdīq*) Muḥammad and what he brought from God, but that does not match what is "in their hearts from Judaism and Christianity."[158] A tradition ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās looks ahead to the wording of Q 3:72 and the story of people planning to feign belief to Muḥammad and his companions in the morning and then show unbelief in the evening. Their intention is to "confound (*labasa*) their religion. Perhaps they

[150] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.
[151] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.
[152] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435–6.
[153] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 436 (trad. 9706).
[154] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 567–8.
[155] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 567.
[156] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 568.
[157] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 505.
[158] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504.

will do what we do, and withdraw from their religion."[159] As at Q 2:42, a number of traditions suggest that the "truth" which is being confounded with "falsehood" is Islam with Judaism and Christianity.[160]

Forgetting

On the phrase "and they have forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of" at Q 5:13, Ṭabarī discerns a nuance in "forgotten" similar to what Muqātil found. He writes that "they gave up (*taraka*) a part."[161] He cross-references another verse, "and they forgot God, and he forgot them,"[162] and glosses its meaning as, "they gave up the command of God, and God gave them up."[163] He also relays a more colorful tradition attributed to al-Ḥassan, "they gave up the handle of their religion, and the duties of God, exalted his praise, without which their deeds cannot be accepted."[164]

At Q 5:14, Ṭabarī gives slightly more space to the phrase "they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of" when applied to Christians (*Naṣāra*).[165] He offers a revealing amplification of the verse:

> We took a covenant with the Christians to obey (*ṭāʿa*) my obligations, to follow (*ittibāʿ*) my apostles and attest (*taṣdīq*) to them,[166] but they inserted (*salaka*) in my covenant that I took with them the way of the straying community of the Jews. Thus they changed (*baddala*) their religion, and destroyed (*naqaḍa*) it and abandoned (*taraka*) a part of my covenant which I took with them to be faithful (*wafāʾ*) to my covenant, and neglected (*ḍayyaʿa*) my command.[167]

Ṭabarī does not mention the "Injīl" as the locus of tampering, but a tradition attributed to Qatāda states that "they forgot the book of God

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[159] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504 (trad. 7223).
[160] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504 (traditions 7224–6); cf. at Q 2:42, Vol. I, 568 (trad. 825).
[161] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129.
[162] Q 9:67.
[163] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129.
[164] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 130.
[165] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 135–6.
[166] Cf. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Christians in the Qurʾān and Tafsīr," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions Throughout History*, ed. J. Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 109.
[167] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 135–6.

in their midst and the covenant of God which he made with them, and the commandment of God which he commanded them."[168]

Analysis: An Action of Adding to Scripture

A number of the actions which Ṭabarī understands from the verses containing these three verbs of tampering are actions of disrespect, duplicity and disobedience. Certainly the sense of "confounding" is dishonesty in response to the prophet of Islam. The understanding of "forgetting" is the Jewish neglect of the obligations which God placed upon them.

"Twisting tongues," or "twisting with tongues," would appear to refer to a verbal action. At Q 4:46, Ṭabarī clearly understands this to be the sense.[169] But at Q 3:78, his focus is on the *kitāb Allāh*, and he describes an action of adding to scripture. Camilla Adang remarks on the exegesis of Q 3:78, "the context suggests that al-Ṭabarī understands these additions as oral, not textual. When these rabbis twist their tongues, they distort the real meaning of the words into something objectionable, scorning Muḥammad and his religion."[170] If Adang means by 'context' a comparison with the exegesis of Q 4:46, she is right to say that the tampering is verbal. If she means by 'context' the larger exegetical passage on Q 3:71–78, this also seems to point away from a falsification of text. However, the 'context' of Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 3:78 itself, with the verbs *alḥaqa, ibtadaʿa* and *zāda*, indicates an accusation of textual falsification.

A question about Ṭabarī's understanding of Q 3:78 is: Why did he refer to "the book of God" as the locus of tampering without specifying the Torah, even though he had clearly identified the Jews of Madīna as the subject? At Q 5:14 he similarly refers to the *kitāb Allāh* in relation to a tampering action of the Christians, but does not specify the Injīl as the locus.

[168] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 136. At the end of his exegesis of Q 5:14, Ṭabarī includes among the wrongs of those who "stretched out their hands against you" (5:11): "their *tabdīl* of his book, and their *taḥrīf* of his commands and his prohibitions." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 140.

[169] Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 101.

[170] *Muslim Writers*, 229.

Ṭabarī's Commentary on Verses Containing Idiomatic Expressions

Description: Strong Tradition of Falsification

Write the Book with Hands

Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 2:79 contains a straightforward description of a tampering action by the Jews, as well as a tradition attributed to ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān which makes a clear accusation of Jewish falsification of the Torah.[171] According to Abū Jaʿfar, "those who write the *kitāb* with their hands" means:

> those who tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) the *kitāb* of God from the Jews Banū Isrāʾīl, and wrote a book according to how they interpret it from their interpretations, opposing what God sent down upon his prophet Moses (PBUH). Then they sold it to a people who had knowledge neither of it nor of what is in the Torah, being ignorant of what is in the *kitāb* of God.[172]

Here Ṭabarī equates the expression "*kitāb* of God" with the Torah, and he states that the Jews tampered with that scripture.

Ṭabarī transmits a number of traditions which simply say that the Jews wrote a *kitāb* which they deceptively sold for gain.[173] Another tradition portrays the Gentiles as doing the same.[174] He also includes a tradition attributed to Abū al-ʿAliya which connects Q 2:79 to the wording of 4:46: "They took up (*ʿamada*) what God sent down in their book from the description of Muḥammad (PBUH), then tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) it from its places."[175] In the midst of these traditions appears a tradition attributed to ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān and traced by Ṭabarī back to Muḥammad himself.

> *Al-Wayl* ["woe"] is a mountain in the fire, and this is what [God] sent down concerning the Jews, because they tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) the Torah, and added (*zāda*) in it what they liked, and erased (*maḥā*) from it what they disliked, and erased the name of Muḥammad (PBUH) from

[171] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 267–274.
[172] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270.
[173] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270–271 (trads. 1388 and 1393).
[174] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270 (trad. 1389).
[175] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 271. Lazarus-Yafeh's rendering of this tradition, that the Jews "removed from its place" the description that was "included in the original divine version of the Torah," does not seem to accurately reflect the text. *Intertwined Worlds*, 20–21.

> the Torah. Therefore God's anger was upon them, and he cancelled (*rafaʿa*) some of the Torah.[176]

Sell for a Little Price

The main thrust of Ṭabarī's exegesis of the expression, "sell for a little price," is his contention that the Jewish leaders concealed information about Muḥammad from the people in exchange for various advantages. The advantages are generally conceived of as material. Ṭabarī glosses "little price" with the expressions "a trifle you covet (*ṭamaʿ*),"[177] "a paltry (*khasīs*) sum,"[178] and "an offer of a little of the goods of this world."[179] The Jewish leaders should explain about Muḥammad to the people without seeking remuneration (*ajr*) for it, writes Ṭabarī.[180]

At Q 2:79, the wording of the verse itself offers a reason for the material interpretation: "what they earn (*kasaba*)." There the exegete understands the Jews to be consuming what the common people give them in exchange for what they write.[181] However, when the expression first appears at Q 2:41, Ṭabarī adds a second motivation to the financial: "The 'little price' is the pleasure (*riḍan*) they take in leading the people of their community and religion who follow them, and the recompense (*ajr*) they take from whomever they explain these things to, for whatever they explain to him."[182]

At the five other occurrences of "sell for a little price" in Sūras 2–7, Ṭabarī shows a certain ambivalence in his identification of what it is that the Jews are giving away in the exchange. At Q 2:174, it is a Jewish action to conceal the matter of Muḥammad from the common people in order to gain a small offer of goods from this world.[183] Here Ṭabarī describes the little price as "the bribe (*rishwa*) which they were given."[184] Similarly at Q 3:187, the exegete finds that the Jews concealed the name of Muḥammad.[185] Such people deserve the exclamation at the

[176] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 271.
[177] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 565.
[178] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 566.
[179] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 566. Ṭabarī offers another phrase at a verse which does not contain the selling expression, Q 3:78: "a paltry sum from the ephemeral things of this world (*ḥutām al-dunyā*)." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536.
[180] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 566.
[181] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 273.
[182] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 273.
[183] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 328.
[184] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 329.
[185] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464.

end of the verse, "How evil was their selling!" Thirdly, at Q 5:44 the rabbis are giving away neglect (*tark*) of the judgment in the verses of God's book which he sent down upon Moses.[186] The judgment in view is the punishment of stoning for adultery in the Torah. According to one tradition, the Jews concealed this.[187] But Ṭabarī also writes at Q 5:44 that the Jews are gaining ill-gotten property (*suht*) by their tampering (*taḥrīf*) with the book of God, their alteration (*taghyīr*) of God's judgment on adultery, and their substitution (*baddala*) of yet other commandments. At Q 3:199, where scripture provides a positive reference to People of the Book who "do not sell the signs of God for a little price," Ṭabarī seems to think exclusively of verbs of alteration. Good people do not tamper with (*ḥarrafa*) and substitute (*baddala*) what God sent down to them in his books about the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad or about God's statutes and proofs.[188]

Throw Behind Backs

When the phrase "throw behind backs" first appears at Q 2:101, Ṭabarī explains that this expression (*mathal*) means "to reject (*rafaḍa*) something."[189] When Muḥammad came to the religious leaders and scholars of the Jews, writes the exegete, he confirmed the Torah and the Torah confirmed him. But the scholars rejected the book of God—the Torah—by denying (*jaḥada*) it and refusing to accept (*rafaḍa*) it after they had acknowledged (*aqarra*). They did this out of envy and injustice toward the prophet of Islam.[190]

At Q 3:187, Ṭabarī glosses the expression "throw behind backs" to mean "they abandoned (*taraka*) the command of God and neglected (*ḍayyaʿa*) it.[191] One of the traditions he cites identifies the object of tampering as the covenant, following the wording of the verse itself.[192] Two other traditions describe the tampering action envisioned here as a two-part process: "they used to read it, only they gave up (*nabadha*)

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[186] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 344.

[187] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 345 (trad. 12021). Cf. 344 (trad. 12019).

[188] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 500. Jane McAuliffe's translation of Ṭabarī's two verbs here as "change" (*ḥarrafa*) and "alteration" (*baddala*) is reasonable, but misses the nuances in the exegete's use of these words which the present study has revealed. *Qurʾānic Christians*, 168.

[189] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 404.

[190] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 403.

[191] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 459.

[192] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464 (trad. 8331).

the doing of it";[193] "they threw (*qadhafa*) it between their hands, but abandoned (*taraka*) the doing of it."[194] It may also be noted that according to a tradition attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, the command from the covenant which the People of the Book rejected was that they obey the prophet of Islam.[195]

Invent a Lie Against God

It was noted in chapter four that though the expression "invent a lie against God" could perhaps be taken as an action of tampering with scripture, Muqātil did not understand it that way. Ṭabarī's interpretation of the phrase shows a similar understanding: he explains that it means speaking a lie against God. For example, at the first occurrence of the phrase at Q 3:94, he refers back to the discussion in the previous verse of what foods the Children of Israel made unlawful (*taḥrīm*) for themselves before the Torah was sent down (Q 3:93). The previous verse contains the striking challenge, "Bring the Torah and read it, if you are truthful." At Q 3:94, Ṭabarī writes, "Whoever lies (*kadhaba*) against God, from us or from you, after your bringing of the Torah and your reading of it…they are the disbelievers."[196]

The exegete's explanation of the phrase at Q 4:50 is also very brief.[197] He gives several examples of lies which the People of the Book invent: they say "we are the sons of God and his beloved ones"; they say that no one will enter heaven except Jews and Christians; and they claim that they have no sin. They say these things, Ṭabarī writes, and then "attribute them falsely to (*ikhtalaqa ʿalā*) God."[198]

Analysis: Moderation of a Harsh Accusation

The tradition which Ṭabarī attributes to ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in his exegesis of Q 2:79 is indeed the sharpest accusation of textual falsification encountered in this study. There *ḥarrafa* of the Torah is explained by the verbs for adding and erasing which follow it. Ṭabarī himself, however (ʿAbū Jaʿfarʾ), appears to moderate the accusation of falsification. He portrays the tampering as an action of Jews to write a *kitāb*

193 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 463 (trad. 8330).
194 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464 (trad. 8332).
195 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 460 (trad. 8320).
196 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 16.
197 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 460.
198 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 460.

different from the Torah, and then to pass it off as the Torah. Adang writes that Ṭabarī "probably" means to say that the tamperers wrote "a separate book, alongside the Torah."[199] The exegete does not use the verbs of subtracting from and adding to the Torah which specify a falsification of the text. In this reading, the meaning of *ḥarrafa* is that the Jewish leaders produce a writing from their own minds and then deceive the people by selling it to them as the Torah.

Andrew Rippin drew attention to three traditions included in Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 2:79 which seem to simply indicate writing books and claiming that they are from God.[200] He suggested that these traditions may have nothing to do with the Torah or its alteration, and speculated that the *kitāb* in view might be the Mishnah or the Talmud.[201] Other scholars who have pursued this line of explanation are Goldziher,[202] Hirschfeld,[203] Watt,[204] and Lazarus-Yafeh.[205] Support for this suggestion in Ṭabarī's commentary comes in his explanations of Q 2:42 and 3:71, where Ibn Zayd explains "confounding the truth with falsehood" as mixing up "the Torah which God sent down upon Moses" with "that which they wrote with their hands."[206]

For the Jews to write a book which is not the Torah, and then claim that it is the Torah, is in Ṭabarī's mind a reprehensible action that certainly belongs under his larger umbrella of 'tampering.' However, Ṭabarī may simply understand it to mean that the Jews are using a second book alongside the Torah. In the story attributed to Ibn Zayd at Q 2:75, the Jewish leaders keep a book with false rulings alongside the Torah, and choose which book to use based on the bribes of the supplicants. In this scenario, the Jews write a book which is definitely not the Torah, but the Torah itself remains unscathed. Similarly at Q 2:79, Ṭabarī finds that the Jews wrote a book out of their own interpretations, and that their deception of the uneducated people is based on the lack of ability of the common people to distinguish between the

[199] *Muslim Writers*, 228.
[200] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270–271 (trads. 1388, 1389, and 1393).
[201] "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 16.
[202] Goldziher noted that al-Maqrīzī associated Q 2:79 and the accusation of falsification with the Mishnah, rather than with the earlier scriptures, in his *Kitāb al-Khiṭaṭ*. "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 368.
[203] *New Researches*, 104.
[204] "The Early Development," 51.
[205] *Intertwined Worlds*, 20.
[206] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 568 (trad. 826); Vol. VI, 505 (trad. 7227).

false book and the Torah. Another reason to believe that Ṭabarī may have had more than one book in mind comes from a scenario which the exegete offers in explanation of the phrase "what the Satans recited over Solomon's kingdom" at Q 2:102:

> The Jews who were in Madīna during the time of the prophet contended with him through the Torah, but found the Torah to be in full agreement with the Qurʾān, commanding them to follow Muḥammad and to assent to all that the Qurʾān enjoins. They instead disputed with him on the basis of books which people wrote down from the dictation of soothsayers (*kuhhan*) who lived during the time of Solomon.[207]

The verses which contain the phrase "sell for small price" focus on the motive of financial gain mainly for an act of concealing or failing to announce information about Muḥammad in the former scriptures. At Q 2:79, their greed is associated with an act of writing a false book. And at Q 2:41, the motive of the Jewish leaders is a desire to maintain their position of authority over the common people. As in Muqātil, the expression seems to pick up its sense from the context of the verse.

In Ṭabarī's exegesis of "throwing behind backs" at Q 2:101 and 3:187, the verb *nabadha* picked up meaning from its association with the verbs *rafaḍa, taraka* and *ḍayyaʿa*. At Q 2:101, the exegete understood that the Jewish leaders denied and discarded the Torah's attestation of the prophethood of Muḥammad. At Q 3:187 he was concerned with the neglect of the covenant, particularly the stipulation to obey the prophet of Islam.

Finally, Ṭabarī understands "inventing a lie against God" to be a verbal action, not an action of tampering with the text of scripture. On the contrary, the context at Q 3:94 ("Bring the Torah and read it," Q 3:93) assumes that the Torah can be produced and checked to verify the claim which is being made about the lawfulness of foods.

Conclusions

1. Ṭabarī's exegesis of a large circle of verses of tampering gives the general impression that the exegete and his chosen traditions assumed an intact Torah text in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna.

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[207] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 405. Translation by Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The* Qurʾān *and its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), Vol. 1, 128–9.

This impression comes, for example, from the repeated occurrence of phrases such as "they find him written with them in the Torah and the Gospel." The frequency and variety of expressions such as "the matter of Muḥammad in the Torah" also suggest to the mind of the reader the assumption of an intact text. Di Matteo was struck by the speech put in the mouth of Muḥammad in traditions cited by Ṭabarī at Q 5:41, "I judge according to that which is found in the Torah."[208] Such phrases indicate a concern for continuity between the earlier scriptures and the recitation which is conceived of as being sent down to the prophet of Islam. The sense of continuity is further strengthened by Ṭabarī's exegesis of the language of covenant and confirmation.

Ṭabarī portrays the literate leaders of the Jews as being privy to special knowledge because of their familiarity with the Torah. A striking expression of this comes in his exegesis of Q 2:40, where he writes that the Jews had knowledge of past narratives "which no one else knew to be correct and true."[209] This knowledge should have inclined the Jews to accept the authenticity of the prophet of Islam, because he was reciting these things without having studied "the books in which these things were reported."[210] Again at Q 2:41, in his amplification of the phrase "be not the first to disbelieve in it," Ṭabarī urges the rabbis to attest the truth of the Qurʾān, "since with you is the knowledge of it which no others have."[211] In the mind of the exegete, "the rabbis of Muhammad's days were better qualified than anyone to inform people about the descriptions of the Prophet as found in the Torah."[212] Their ability to attest to Muḥammad, responsibility to inform the illiterate, and culpability should they not do so, were all firmly based on the assumption of an intact Torah in their hands.

2. The definitions of the verb *ḥarrafa* which Ṭabarī explicitly offers point firmly toward change of interpretation. He registers this meaning the first two times he encounters the verb, at Q 2:75 and 4:46. Adang summarizes Ṭabarī's definition as, "changing its meaning and interpretation, deliberately bending its original meaning to something else."[213] Ṭabarī does not repeat this definition at Q 5:13, nor does he

[208] "Il 'Taḥrīf' od alterazione," 82–83.
[209] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 554.
[210] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 554–5.
[211] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 563.
[212] Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 228.
[213] *Muslim Writers*, 148. This definition is also given twice at a *katama* verse, Q 2:174. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 328–329.

give an alternative definition there, even though he seems to indicate a falsification of the Torah itself. At Q 5:41 he specifies that the *taḥrīf* of the Jews was their changing of the judgment of God.

3. Ṭabarī makes an accusation of addition to the text of the Torah in his exegesis of Q 3:78. He also transmits traditions which specify alteration of text at Q 3:78 and 2:79. These traditions employ strong verbs of addition and deletion. At Q 5:13 his exegesis of *ḥarrafa* indicates that the Jews tampered with the Torah. Though he does not use verbs of addition or deletion in this passage, his interpretation seems to envision falsification of text. This suggests at the very least that accusations of textual falsification were among the traditions which Ṭabarī collected and reported in his commentary, and that these accusations had become attached to specific verses in the Qurʾān.

These accusations of textual falsification are therefore part of the total group of actions which Ṭabarī envisions in his exegesis of the tampering verses. The question which this raises is why these accusations appear so tentative and isolated among such a wide variety of tampering actions which assume an intact text. Why does the accusation seem to appear at one of the *ḥarrafa* verses (Q 5:13), but not at the other three? Why do the sharpest accusations come at verses which contain no verbs of alteration?

It was noted in chapter four that the wording of Q 2:79 appears to have a relationship with a tradition cited in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in which two phrases are identical with scripture (indicated with quotation marks): the People of the Book distorted the book "with their hands," then said it is "from God, that they may sell it for a little price." The wording of Q 3:78 also resembles that of Q 2:79, in that the actors apparently referred to claim that something is "from God, yet it is not from God." Though the verb of tampering in Q 3:78, *lawā*, seems to indicate a verbal action, both Ṭabarī and Muqātil understood an action of textual falsification from the verse. Further, in his exegesis of Q 5:13, Ṭabarī pictures the Jewish leaders "writing with their hands" something different from what God revealed, then claiming to the illiterate people that what they wrote was the word of God. Perhaps it is this reference to claiming divine authority for a writing (*kitāb*) which God did not reveal which triggers the accusation of falsification at Q 2:79, 3:78 and 5:13.

Another possible explanation for Ṭabarī's understanding of a falsification of text at Q 5:13 is the immediate Qurʾānic context of the verse—and indeed the context of Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 5:13 within

the commentary. The exegete gives special attention to the scriptural term "treachery." His explanation of the verse begins with a reference to the Jews acting treacherously and "stretching out their hands" to Muḥammad and his companions.[214] In his explanation of "you will never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part," he specifies the plan of the Banū Naḍīr to murder the prophet of Islam.[215] The reference is to Q 5:11: "O believers, remember God's blessing upon you, when a certain people purposed to stretch against you their hands, and He restrained their hands from you."[216] Is it possible that in the context of a portrayal of the ultimate treachery of the Jews toward Muḥammad, Ṭabarī chose to offer an interpretation of *ḥarrafa* which emphasized the extremes to which a faithless people might go?

A third possibility for the isolated and tentative character of Ṭabarī's accusations of falsification at Q 2:79, 3:78 and 5:13 will be explored in chapter 6: the influence of the narrative framework. In any case, the accusations offered by Ṭabarī do not resemble the doctrine of scriptural corruption as it came to be known. They do not reflect the fully-developed concept of a general corruption of the text of the Torah throughout the regions where Jews and Christians lived. The scenarios are one-dimensional. The object of deletion in ʿUthmān's tradition at Q 2:79 is the name of Muḥammad.[217] The Jewish leaders

[214] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 153.

[215] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 157.

[216] The *Sīra* also links Q 5:11 with the plot to murder Muḥammad. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 403.

[217] This observation invites further research. The accusations of falsification in Muqātil's commentary were also seen to focus on the description of Muḥammad. This strong link between the harshest accusations of textual falsification and the doctrinaire claim of a description of Muḥammad in the former scriptures continued at least into the 11th century. As the *sabab al-nuzūl* for Q 2:79, al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1075) wrote, "[this verse] came down concerning those who changed (*ghayyara*) the description (*ṣifa*) of the prophet and substituted (*baddala*) his description (*naʿt*)." Al-Wāḥidī transmits the following tradition, attributed to al-Kalbī: "They changed (*ghayyara*) the description (*ṣifa*) of the messenger of God (PBUP) in their book, and made him a man with long hair and of medium brown [coloring]. They said to their companions and followers: 'Look at the description (*naʿt*) of the prophet who is to appear at the end of time; it does not resemble the description (*naʿt*) of this [man].' The Rabbis and the scholars used to receive provisions from the rest of the Jews and they feared that their provisions would disappear if they announced the [true] description (*ṣifa*); therefore they changed (*ghayyara*) [it]." *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 15. Cf. Rippin, "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 15–16. al-Wāḥidī includes some extra details about exactly how the Jewish religious leaders changed the description of Muḥammad. But the more striking factor is that in the fifth Islamic century the *sabab* of this important tampering verse in the most famous of the *asbāb* works is still focused on the description of Muḥammad, and

in Ibn Zayd's tradition at Q 2:75 use a second book of rulings about what is permitted and forbidden. Legal punishments are also the concern of the Ibn ʿAbbās tradition at Q 5:13. At Q 3:78, Ṭabarī and his traditions do not actually indicate what the Jews added to the book. The many doctrinaire categories of Ibn Ḥazm's later polemic are not in view here. Neither are sophisticated 'historical' arguments advanced. Adang notes that Ṭabarī tells the story of the destruction of the Torah in Babylonian times and the rewriting of the Torah by Ezra in his *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, but he does not give this story in his *Tafsīr*.[218] Even in the *Taʾrīkh* account, Ṭabarī simply assumes that Ezra miraculously remembered and rewrote the entire Torah as it had existed prior to its destruction.[219]

John Burton writes at the conclusion of his study of Ṭabarī's exegesis of the *ḥarrafa* and *katama* verses,

> One notes a curious reluctance on the part of al-Ṭabarī to accuse the Jewish scholars of altering the texts of the Tora. Although the earlier authorities on which he leans and on whose views he draws liberally, show no such hesitation, he himself appears to prefer to moderate their charges by speaking of the Jews' tampering with the interpretation of the revealed texts in their possession.[220]

If Burton is thinking about Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 2:79, which he mentions but does not explore in his study, he is correct. There the exegete's own statement certainly appears moderate alongside ʿUthmān's 'unhesitating' accusation of addition and deletion in the Torah. He is also right if he is thinking about Ṭabarī's rejection of the Ibn Zayd tradition of the rabbis and the two books as the interpretation of

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on nothing else. Similarly at Q 3:77, immediately preceding the other scriptural passage which seemed to trigger accusations of falsification for both Muqātil and Ṭabarī, al-Wāḥidī offers an elaborate narrative in which Jewish scholars write a false description of Muḥammad in order to receive gifts from Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf. At the beginning of the story, Kaʿb asks the scholars, "Do you know that this man is the messenger of God in your book?' The scholars answer "Yes," and add, "We bear witness that he is the servant of God and his apostle." *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 59. Cf. Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its Interpreters*, Vol 2 (1992), 229–230. It is also significant that in the fifth Islamic century, the established *asbāb* for these important tampering verses still envision the falsification of the former scriptures as occurring during the career of the prophet of Islam in Madīna.

[218] *Muslim Writers*, 230–231. Cf. Moshe Perlmann, trans., *The Ancient Kingdoms* (The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 4) (State University of New York Press, 1987), 64–65.

[219] Lazarus-Yafeh examines the use of the Muslim Ezra stories in exegesis and polemic in *Intertwined Worlds*, 50–74.

[220] "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 105.

Q 2:75.[221] Burton's statement would definitely characterize the overall impression which Ṭabarī's exegesis of the tampering verses creates. However, Ṭabarī also showed that he could himself make use of verbs indicating textual alteration in his commentary on Q 3:78—a passage which Burton neglects to explore.

4. The stories which Ṭabarī narrates in his many tampering passages portray actions which are included in a larger category of 'tampering with scripture' but do not point in the direction of textual falsification. In fact, most of the stories rely for their narrative dynamic on the assumption of an intact text. The Jews of Madīna feel animosity toward Muḥammad and express this in their rejection of his authority. The Jewish religious leaders know the truth about Muḥammad from the scriptures which they read, but they give the lie to him and deny him. They don't acknowledge that Muḥammad's recitations are from God. They hide what they know about Muḥammad because they fear that if they told the truth they would lose both income and authority. In placing emphasis on concealment as the nub of Jewish culpability, Ṭabarī is simply following the rhetoric of scripture itself: "Who does greater evil than he who conceals a testimony received from God?" (Q 2:140). The Jewish leaders also mislead the illiterate Jews who don't know the difference between the Torah and a book of Rabbinic interpretations. They mock and insult both Muḥammad and his religion. The Jews neglect the enforcement of the explicit laws of the Torah, putting more lenient punishments in their place.

Ṭabarī's way of portraying these actions is literary. He "records several scenarios in which the 'people of the book' clearly recognize in their scriptures both their covenant obligations and the authentication of Muhammad's prophethood, but defiantly ignore the one and refuse acknowledgement to the other."[222] This leads into the subject of the next chapter. If Ṭabarī frequently explains the meaning of tampering verses through narrative material, what is the influence of a narrative framework of Jewish resistance to Muḥammad's authority on the exegete's development of the tampering motif?

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[221] "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 100.
[222] McAuliffe, "The Qur'ānic Context," 146.

CHAPTER SIX

METHOD AND MEANING IN INTERPRETATION OF THE QURʾĀN

The preceding chapters have presented a full description and analysis of the exegetical treatment of the tampering verses in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. These chapters have developed in detail what the two exegetes understood by the verbs and expressions which are found in the semantic field of tampering. Familiarity with the exegesis of the verses of tampering, however, brings intimations of concerns which reach outside of the particular passages thus far described and analyzed. The reader repeatedly glimpses hints of larger literary patterns in the commentaries which appear to influence the interpretation of individual verses. The tampering motif, it follows from these intimations, cannot be adequately known from the interpretations of the particular tampering verses alone. In other words, while an examination of the individual exegetical treatments of the tampering verses by these exegetes has provided a good idea of the language of tampering in their commentaries, more investigation is needed in order to fully understand the operation of the tampering motif. This chapter now articulates the claim of the influence of literary structures on the tampering motif, and substantiates this claim through appeal to a broad spectrum of materials in the commentaries. The dimensions of the proposed structures, their function, and their influence are explored. The results of this exploration are then applied to the understanding of the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries. This is not an exploration of exegetical method for its own sake, but rather an inquiry into how method relates to meaning—in particular to the significance of the exegetical passages on tampering. The chapter is followed up by a demonstration of the influence of a narrative structure on the development of the tampering motif within a separate but related work, the *Sīrat al-Nabī* of Ibn Isḥāq.

The existence of larger patterns which loom over the exegetical treatment of individual verses in Muqātil's commentary was suggested by an expression in John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies*. Wansbrough found evidence for the operation of a "narrative framework" in

Muqātil's *Tafsīr*.[1] He used this expression to describe a narrative structure—or series of literary patterns—which allows an exegete to explain the meaning of otherwise seemingly vague and unrelated verses. Kees Versteegh also uses the phrase "an overall frame" to characterize the accumulated effect of Muqātil's practice of giving the circumstances of revelation and specifying the persons to whom the verse was applied.[2] This concept is brought into use in order to deepen the understanding of the tampering motif in the commentaries of this study. The exploration begins with Muqātil's commentary and proceeds to inquire how far the suggestion of a narrative framework could also be relevant to Ṭabarī's development of the theme.

Wansbrough's use of the concept of "narrative framework" was part of his larger exploration of the method of exegesis which he found best exemplified in Muqātil's commentary, and which he termed "haggadic exegesis."[3] The name is suggestive of a style of commentary which explains the meanings of the words of scripture by telling stories.[4] A characteristic feature of many of the Muqātil passages referred to in this study is the introductory formula *wa-dhālika anna* followed by a story. Wansbrough found this style of exegesis to be the earliest form of Qurʾānic commentary.[5] He made a link between haggadic exegesis as modeled by Muqātil and the sermons of popular preachers.[6] In his examination of the commentary he found a number of literary devices which he felt must indicate "oral delivery": inconsistent use

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[1] *Quranic Studies*, 123, 125, 137, 141. The writings of John Wansbrough are used extensively in this chapter and the next because this scholar has provided the deepest analysis of the exegetical method of Muqātil in the context of the formative period of Qurʾānic commentary. *Quranic Studies*, 122–146. Wansbrough also wrote insightfully on the narrative themes in what he saw as a kind of mirror image of Muqātil's *tafsīr*—the *Sīrat al-Nabī* of Ibn Isḥāq. *Quranic Studies*, 122–9. *Sectarian Milieu*, 2–49.

[2] "Grammar and Exegesis," 210.

[3] *Quranic Studies*, 122–148.

[4] Herbert Berg writes that Wansbrough borrowed the name from "Jewish scriptural interpretation." *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The authenticity of Muslim literature from the formative period* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 79. Cf. Norman Calder: "The terminology is sectarian, though probably intended to reflect the universality of hermeneutic approaches." "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 105; and Andrew Rippin: "The basic inspiration and thrust of Wansbrough's approach may once again perhaps be traced to modern biblical studies." "Literary analysis of Qurʾān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*," 161.

[5] *Quranic Studies*, 121. Cf. Kees Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 210.

[6] *Quranic Studies*, 145–148.

of connectives;[7] "supercommentary";[8] compulsive identification of the vague and anonymous;[9] "stage directions" following *qāla*;[10] and serial repetition and circular explication.[11] For an historical link between the popular sermon and haggadic exegesis, Wansbrough drew on the work of Johannes Pedersen, Geo Widengren and Ignaz Goldziher. The activity of the popular preachers, or *quṣṣāṣ*, "consisted in interpreting the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, enforcing law, and impressing people with fear and hope."[12] The preachers told popular tales, including narratives about the prophet of Islam and his companions.[13] Starting out as a high official in the mosque, the preacher seems to have slipped in reputation due to a tendency toward what Pedersen calls "less controlled activity." "As his aim was to impress his audience he was tempted to use the means fittest for that purpose."[14]

Goldziher wrote about the popular preacher in his *Muslim Studies*.[15] There he recounted many stories from Muslim tradition about the excesses for which the preachers eventually came to be characterized. But he also noted references in the tradition to a time in the early days of Islam when the name *qāṣṣ* had a favorable connotation.[16] Some of these preachers are said to have encouraged the Arabian troops in their wars. But others were "mentioned with distinction as expounders of the Koran."[17] Within this category Goldziher distinguished "homiletic exegetes" as well as "tellers of sacred stories."[18] On the evidence of extracts from sermons offered by al-Jāḥiẓ, Goldziher concluded that the work of the preachers was at one time seen as a positive aspect of

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[7] *Quranic Studies*, 129, 145.
[8] *Quranic Studies*, 129, 145.
[9] *Quranic Studies*, 136.
[10] *Quranic Studies*, 145.
[11] *Quranic Studies*, 145, 130–131.
[12] Johannes Pedersen, "The Islamic Preacher: *wāʿiẓ, mudhakkir, qāṣṣ*," in *The Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, Vol. 1, S. Lowinger, ed. (Budapest, 1948), 237.
[13] Geo Widengren, "Oral tradition and written literature among the Hebrews in the light of Arabic evidence, with special regard to prose narratives," *Acta Orientalia* 23 (1959), 237.
[14] Johannes Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Die Welt des Islams* 2 (1953), 216. For more details on the worsening reputation of the *quṣṣāṣ*, see Ch. Pellat, "Ḳaṣṣ," *EI2* (1978), Vol. 4, 734–735.
[15] *Muslim Studies*, C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern, translators (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), Vol. 2, 150–159.
[16] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 152.
[17] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 153.
[18] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 153.

the religious life of Islam.[19] Regarding the contents of the sermons, he mentioned stories about Biblical characters, but did not make reference to anecdotes about Muḥammad and his companions.[20] Goldziher added an interesting comment on the way in which the preachers tried to give their audience the impression that they were the experts of sacred history. "They left no question unanswered because it would have damaged their reputation before the populace if they had admitted their ignorance."[21] As examples, he cites the *qāṣṣ* who pretended to give the name of the golden calf, and another preacher who "knew exactly the name of the wolf who had eaten Joseph"—even though in the story Joseph had escaped the meal![22]

Goldziher also made an explicit link between the verbal activities of the *quṣṣāṣ* and the written *Tafsīr* of Muqātil in a passage from his survey of Muslim exegesis, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*.[23] Goldziher wrote about the disapproval by some early Muslim scholars such as Ibn Ḥanbal of a kind of uncontrolled exegesis that incorporated "apocalyptic legends and fables of wars." In the explanation of the Qurʾān, a delight in telling fables was especially active in relation to the various Biblical legends, "which Muḥammad himself had summarized in the style of a compendium, often in a contaminated way." Goldziher suggested that believers wanted to know more about these stories, and had an even greater appetite for this information than for the details of legal prescriptions. In response to this demand a "crowd of curious scribes" filled in the gaps of the Qurʾān out of their dealings with the Jews and Christians, frequently embellishing whatever they had heard with stories out of their own imaginations and pretending to be giving expositions of the Qurʾān.[24]

One of these "curious scribes," according to Goldziher, was "one Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (died 772), who is characterized as having received his 'knowledge of the Qurʾān' from Jews and Christians and

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[19] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 153.

[20] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 156. Goldziher's main focus in the discussions was prophetic traditions.

[21] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 156–157.

[22] *Muslim Studies*, Vol. 2, 157. This brings to mind the claim of Muqātil, in his commentary on Q 27:18, to know the name of the ant who spoke with Sulaymān. Cf. Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis," 214.

[23] *Richtungen*, 57–9.

[24] *Richtungen*, 57–8. Cf. Ignaz Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, Wolfgang H. Behn, ed. and trans. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 37–8.

as having harmonized this with their books." Goldziher connected Muqātil with "the class of pious story tellers (*quṣṣāṣ*; sing. *qāṣṣ*) who had already appeared in the early period, and in whose activity the fantastic element predominated."[25] It was the "capricious" exegesis of interpreters like Muqātil that Goldziher felt was responsible for the discouragement of *tafsīr* in early Islam. "There was no secret for them, and it gave them neither trouble nor scruple to offer as plausible their fantasy pictures—which they attached to the Qurʾān through misleading dependence on reputable authorities."[26] As examples of this exegesis through 'fantasy pictures,' Goldziher cited Muqātil's interpretations of the Qurʾānic verses Q 17:58 and 67:2.[27]

Wansbrough assumed a long period of oral composition and transmission prior to the first fixed texts of Arabic literature.[28] If the process whereby the oral popular sermon became written haggadic exegesis is not altogether clear,[29] reasoned Wansbrough, the material used by the preacher certainly made its way into the earliest commentaries.[30] He characterized that material as didactic in an entertaining way, pious and edifying.[31]

In the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, the reader glimpses the outlines of a narrative structure of Jewish response—and primarily resistance—to religious claims surrounding the prophet of Islam. The indications come in individual anecdotes which owe much to the stories told by the earliest preachers of Islam. The Jewish response is represented by the Jews of Madīna during the career of Muḥammad in that city. The Muslim claims include the assertion that Muḥammad is a true prophet and messenger of God, and the declaration that the words he is reciting are indeed revelations from God. This chapter will present the evidence for this narrative structure in the commentaries. It will describe how the narrative structure shows itself in the exegesis of the tampering verses. Finally, it will make the case that the narrative

[25] *Richtungen*, 58.
[26] *Richtungen*, 59.
[27] *Richtungen*, 59–60. Goldziher took his examples from later sources, and they do not match the exegesis of these verses in the published version of Muqātil's commentary. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 537 (on Q 17:58); Vol. IV, 389 (on Q 67:2).
[28] *Quranic Studies*, 146.
[29] *Quranic Studies*, 148.
[30] *Quranic Studies*, 147. See also Regula Forster: "Muqātil steht zwar mit seiner Arbeitsweise in der Tradition der Erzähler von biblisch-Qurʾānischen Geschichten (der sog. *quṣṣāṣ*)." "Methoden arabischer Qurʾānexegese," 389.
[31] *Quranic Studies*, 147–148.

structure exerts an influence on the exegetical development of the tampering motif.

The Narrative Framework in Muqātil's Tafsīr

The exegical devices used by Muqātil in his *Tafsīr* have been described at the beginning of chapter four of this study. Among those various devices Wansbrough distinguished four "narrative elements": anecdote, prophetical tradition, identification of the vague and ambiguous, and the description of the occasions of revelation.[32] Of these four, Wansbrough characterized the first three as "typically haggadic."[33] He explained that while the occasion of revelation is certainly present in haggadic exegesis, it is only there in an "underdeveloped form."[34] The occasion of revelation only really came into its own in halakhic exegesis, he claimed, because the basic purpose of the occasion of revelation was to establish a chronology of revelation. Haggadic exegesis is not interested in this function, he wrote. However, he noted, if the occasion of revelation is not a device typical of narrative exegesis, it has an important role to play in the narrative framework.[35]

Andrew Rippin has disputed Wansbrough's claim that the "essential function of the *sabab al-nuzūl*" was to be found in works which focused on deriving law from the Qurʾān.[36] He writes that a study of a wide range of *asbāb* materials reveals rather that the purpose of the occasion of revelation was not halakhic but rather haggadic. "Its function is to provide a narrative account in which the basic exegesis of the verse may be embodied."[37] In other words, the primary purpose of the *sabab* was literary rather than legal. It was part of the imaginative effort of the exegete to 'historicize' the Qurʾān[38]—to construct an overarching narrative framework in which seemingly unrelated fragments

[32] *Quranic Studies*, 141.
[33] *Quranic Studies*, 141.
[34] *Quranic Studies*, 141.
[35] *Quranic Studies*, 141.
[36] *Quranic Studies*, 141. Rippin, "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 1–20.
[37] Rippin, "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 3. In a restatement of his thesis at the end of the article, Rippin uses the phrase, "a basic narrative framework." "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 19. If Rippin is right, his modification of Wansbrough strengthens the claim of this chapter about the importance of larger literary structures and their influence on individual motifs.
[38] Rippin, "Occasions of Revelation," *EQ* (2003), Vol. 3, 572.

of scripture could find meaning. Thus Rippin would include the occasion of revelation in a list of the "typically haggadic" exegetical devices in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*.

Wansbrough did not appear to draw his observations about Muqātil's exegetical method from a sustained examination of the exegete's commentary. Rather, he seems to have taken most of his examples from Muqātil's interpretation of Sūra 18.[39] Wansbrough evidently did not look closely at the opening of the commentary, the exegesis of the second Sūra, where Muqātil first demonstrates his exegetical method and gives the first indications of the narrative framework. In order to properly understand both the method and the framework, therefore, an investigation of Muqātil's interpretation of the second Sūra is essential.

Patterns in an Extended Exegetical Passage

When Muqātil's exegesis of the first 162 verses of Sūra 2 is examined closely,[40] it reveals strong evidence for the the existence of a narrative

[39] *Quranic Studies*, 122 ff. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 572–607.

[40] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81–153. Scholars have variously identified the extended opening section of the second Sūra which was traditionally understood to concern the People of the Book. According to the *Sīra*, "In reference to these Jewish rabbis and the hypocrites of Aws and Khazraj, the beginning of Sūrat al-Baqara up to the one-hundredth [verse] came down, according to what I have been told, but God knows." Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 372. Andrew Rippin makes a division between a section of "Biblical history" up to Q 2:141 and a section on "Islamic identity" beginning with Q 2:142. *Muslims: Their religious beliefs and practices*, Third Edition (London: Routledge, 2005), 33–34. Neal Robinson distinguishes the part of the *sūra* up to Q 2:152 from what comes after it, understanding "O you who believe" (Q 2:153) to signal the start of a section on "legislation for the new nation" which was "revealed" on a different occasion from that which precedes it. *Discovering the Qur'an: A contemporary approach to a veiled text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 211. Hartwig Hirschfeld shared the same opinion on Q 2:152 and the 10 verses which follow it. *New Researches*, 109, 144, 145. Mustansir Mir—and through him Iṣlāḥī—sees the section on the Abrahamic legacy continuing up to Q 2:162, after which he understands a section on the Sharīʿa to begin with the words, "Your God is one God." "The *Sūra* as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur'ān Exegesis," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 217. A.H. Mathias Zahniser discusses some of the scholarly views in "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: *al-Baqara* and *al-Nisā'*," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the* Qur'ān, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 28–38. David E. Smith ends a unit on the "Failure of the Children of Israel" at Q 2:118, and describes the next section (Q 2:119–167) as "Reaffirmation of the authority of the Qur'ān and Muḥammad through the appropriation of the Abrahamic tradition." For Smith, the

framework. The passage contains many examples of anecdote and occasion of revelation. Indeed, the anecdote which Wansbrough translated from Muqātil's exegesis of Q 18:9 and gave in full in *Quranic Studies* is typical of the kind of brief story found in the opening section of the commentary.[41] The prophetical tradition does not in fact make its appearance in this section of the commentary.[42] However, identification of the vague and anonymous diversifies into a number of distinguishable narrative elements. As specializations of the category *taʿyīn al-mubham*, Muqātil employs both characterization and personification. The repeated identification of such vague objects of tampering as "the matter of Muḥammad" heightens the narrative dynamic. Muqātil also uses a literary technique of linking stories from the distant past with the story of Muḥammad in Madīna through a series of important themes. This device could appropriately be termed "liaison."[43]

One of the main narrative techniques in Muqātil's exegesis of Q 2:1–162 is the identification of the unspecified subjects and objects of the verses. In this whole section, the Jews living in Madīna during the story of Muḥammad in that city play the major narrative role. The immediacy of their introduction is striking. Muqātil understands the very first words of the *sūra*, "*Alif Lām Mīm*. That is the book" (Q 2:1–2a), to refer to an encounter between two Jews and the prophet of Islam.[44] References to the Jews continue all the way up to the exegesis of Q 2:160.[45] Though no word for "Jews" occurs in the first 28 verses of the *sūra*, Muqātil uses the expression *al-Yahūd* 12 times in his exegesis of these verses, plus five more times in his explanations of cross-references. He also refers to the chiefs (*raʾūs*) of the Jews once and the

'basic Islamic legislation' begins at Q 2:168. "The Structure of al-Baqara," *The Muslim World* 91 (2001), 122–3. Kate Zebiri simply writes that the longest sustained passage of Qurʾānic polemic against the Jews "takes up about half of the longest sūra of the Qurʾān," beginning from Q 2:40. "Polemic and Polemical Language," 120.

[41] *Quranic Studies*, 122. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 574–576. The story begins typically with *wa dhālika anna (*p. 574).

[42] Wansbrough wrote that Muqātil "favoured" the prophetical tradition, and cited two examples from the exegete's interpretation of Sūra 18. *Quranic Studies*, 133.

[43] This seems to follow the Qurʾān's own pattern. Zebiri finds that the first extended polemical passage in the Qurʾān "dissolves the distance between past and present by directly associating Muḥammad's Jewish contemporaries with the misdeeds of Jews almost two millennia previously." "Polemic and Polemical Language," 121.

[44] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.

[45] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 153.

"people of the Torah" twice.[46] After the story of Adam in the *sūra*, the expression "Children of Israel" occurs twice in Q 2:40–47, thought still not "Jews." In his explanation of those verses, however, Muqātil identifies the Jews of Madīna 11 times, plus the chiefs three times and the lowly people (or riffraff, *sifla*) of the Jews twice.[47] After the extended narrative of Moses and the Children of Israel, the term "Children of Israel" appears in the Qur᾿an twice, *Hūd* once (at Q 2:111), and *Yahūd* three times (first at Q 2:113), in Q 2:75–123. Muqātil's exegesis of the same passage, however, mentions the Madīnan Jews in general 42 times, the chiefs four times, the riffraff twice, and the "people of the Torah" three times.[48] Finally, after the story of Abraham, the term *Hūd* appears twice in Q 2:134–162, while the exegete mentions the Jews 22 times, the chiefs once, and the people of the Torah twice.[49] In all, Muqātil identifies the Jews of Madīna 112 times as the actors of the mostly vague and anonymous first 162 verses of the second Sūra.

Muqātil does indeed mention other actors in this section of commentary: the "associating" Arabs of Makka,[50] the martyrs of Badr,[51] the *Naṣāra* of Najrān,[52] and even the Byzantines of Qusṭanṭīniyya.[53] However, none of these communities receives the sustained treatment which Muqātil gives to the Jews. Muqātil also takes the identification of the Jews further than that of any other group by characterizing them extensively through gloss and anecdote. At many points he glosses general scriptural references to "those who disbelieve" (*kafara*), "the ungodly" (*fāsiqūn*) or "the evildoers" (*ẓālimūn*) with simply "meaning the Jews." The frequent anecdotes—more effective in painting the actors with memorable narrative color—portray the Jews as dishonest, scheming and unaccountably obstinate. A good example of a negative Jewish characteristic introduced into the exegesis of Q 2:1–162 is envy. Muqātil first signals this quality (*ḥasad*) in his explanation of Q 2:16.[54] Later, evidently with scriptural warrant at Q 2:90 (*baghy*) and 2:109

46 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81–96.
47 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 100–102.
48 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 116–135.
49 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 140–153.
50 Entering as actors only after the Jews, at Q 2:7. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 88.
51 At Q 2:154. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 150–152.
52 Especially beginning at Q 2:113. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 132.
53 At Q 2:114. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 133.
54 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 91.

(*ḥasad*), he extends the charge that the Jews rejected Muḥammad when he appeared because they saw he was not one of their own kind.[55]

Repetition of Evocative Names

The general references to "the Jews" are often accompanied with the naming of particular members of the community in Madīna. For example, the sons of Akhṭab—Judayy, Abū Yāsir, and Ḥuyayy—appear frequently, as does Ibn Ṣūriyā.

However, identification makes way for another literary technique in Muqātil with the serial repetition of a pair of evocative names. The name of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf appears in the very first exegetical segment of this passage,[56] and repeats eight more times in the exegesis of the first 159 verses.[57] Muqātil introduces Kaʿb in his explanation of the phrases of Q 2:1 and 2:2a, "*Alif Lām Mīm*. That is the book." The exegete writes: "That is about how Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and Kaʿb ibn Asad said, when the prophet (PBUH) called the two of them to *islām*, 'God has not sent down a book after Moses'—denying (*takdhīb*) it."[58] In his subsequent appearances in the commentary, Kaʿb is the leader of a group of disbelieving and obstinate Jews who oppose the authority of Muḥammad. At Q 2:14, Muqātil identifies the scriptural "Satans" as Kaʿb and his friends.[59]

The name of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām appears in Muqātil's commentary shortly after Kaʿb's, in the exegesis of Q 2:3,[60] then repeats nine more times in the explanations of the first 130 verses.[61] Muqātil introduces ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām in his exegesis of Q 2:4. In a kind of 'stage direction' just prior to the scriptural words, "who believe," the exegete writes: "Then he mentioned the believers of the people of the Torah, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions, among them Usayd ibn Zayd and Asad ibn Kaʿb and Salām ibn Qays and Thaʿlaba ibn ʿAmr and Ibn Yāmīn."[62] His appearances throughout Muqātil's exegesis of

[55] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 122, 130–131.
[56] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.
[57] At Q 2:5, 2:14, 2:41, 2:76, 2:101, 2:135, and 2:146.
[58] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.
[59] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 91.
[60] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.
[61] At Q 2:5 (x3), 2:13 (x2), 2:83, 2:121 (x2), and 2:130.
[62] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81.

Sūra 2 show him to be an honest and honorable Jew who believes in and follows Muḥammad. In the long narrative section which Muqātil offers after the words of Q 2:5, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām is challenged by the disbelieving Jews to give up his faith, but he and his companions stand firm.[63] At Q 2:13, the Jews are exhorted to "believe in Muḥammad like ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his friends have believed." But the Jews refuse, calling the converts ignorant.[64]

The frequent and regular repetition of these names, and the anecdotes which Muqātil retails about them, serve to personify the two stereotypical Jewish responses to Muḥammad. Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf becomes a symbol for the obstinate rejection of the authority of the prophet of Islam by the Jews.[65] ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām correspondingly represents the honest acceptance of the prophethood and apostleship of Muḥammad based on knowledge of his description in the Torah.[66]

Linking the Past to the Prophet of Islam

Another literary device of Muqātil in the category of *taʿyīn al-mubham* is the repeated identification of the mysterious object of tampering as the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad. It was noted in chapter four how

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[63] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 86–87.

[64] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 90.

[65] Rudolf Sellheim found that in the *Sīra*, Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf becomes the designated enemy of God "after Badr," and subsequently draws the special anger of the prophet of Islam on himself. "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte: Die Muḥammed-Biographie des Ibn Isḥāq," *Oriens* xviii–xix (1965–7), 81. Other Muslim traditions suggest that the clash between Kaʿb and Muḥammad began with an incident in which Kaʿb tried to prevent Muḥammad from establishing a market on his land. M.J. Kister, "The Market of the Prophet," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965), 272–6.

[66] H. Hirschfeld observed regarding ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām: "It is a prominent feature of Moslim tradition whenever the characteristics of a class of individuals are under discussion, that one person is made the representative of the common idea and held responsible for anything said or done by any person belonging to that class, or anything that might have been said or done by them. Historical veracity is in this respect not so much sought after, the chief object being to throw a brilliant light on a certain point." "Historical and Legendary Controversies," 109. J. Horovitz also wrote about ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām: "In Muslim tradition he has become the typical representative of that group of Jewish scribes which honored the truth, admitting that Muḥammad was the Prophet predicted in the Torah, and protecting him from the intrigues of their co-religionists." "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām," 52. Steven Wasserstrom suggests that the words in the mouth of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām are "Muslim reimaginings of the primordial confrontation with Judaism." *Between Muslim and Jew*, 176.

frequently Muqātil found this to be the unspecified object in the tampering verses for words as diverse as "truth," "sign" and "testimony." This identification is analyzed in greater depth below. Here it must be noted that indicating the matter of Muḥammad repeatedly from the beginning of the commentary characterizes many of the tampering actions as personal responses to the prophet of Islam. If the object of tampering was taken to be a wide variety of objects, such as for example alleged sins of prophets in the Torah or affirmations of the deity of Jesus in the Gospel, there would be no cumulative effect on the narrative dynamic. However, by repeating this particular identification Muqātil reinforces the central narrative pattern, and at the same time links the prophetic voices of the pre-Islamic past with the Muslim story and lends coherence to the commentary.

Muqātil links stories from the ancient past with the story of Muḥammad—and keeps the narrative flow of his exegesis moving—through reference to themes such as covenant, confirmation and authoritative scripture. A good example of this liaison device is in Muqātil's exegesis of Q 2:40–41, where all three concepts appear together.[67] The first time Muqātil discusses the theme of covenant in his commentary is where the word covenant (*ahd*) first appears in the Qurʾān, at 2:27. The scriptural words, "The ungodly, such as break the covenant after its solemn binding,"[68] signify the Jews, according to Muqātil. The covenant was taken in the Torah. And the covenant was "that they would worship God and not associate anything with him, and that they would believe in the prophet."[69] At the second occurrence of the term covenant, Q 2:40, Muqātil adds more information. The Children of Israel also agreed to believe "in the prophets and the book."[70]

The Qurʾānic language of confirmation (*muṣaddiq*) appears for the first time in Q 2:41. Muqātil first explains that "covenant" refers to the agreement which God made with the Jews in the Torah. He very quickly specifies that an essential stipulation in that covenant was that the Jews would believe in Muḥammad.[71] "But they disbelieved in Muḥammad,"

[67] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 100, 101.
[68] this phrase repeats at Q 13:25.
[69] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 95.
[70] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 100. Here Muqātil cross-references Q 5:12 and indicates that "believe in my messengers" means "in Muḥammad."
[71] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 100.

Muqātil writes.[72] When he explains the phrase, "confirming that which is with you," Muqātil again links this with the Torah.[73] The matter of Muḥammad is to be found in the Torah, he writes, but the Jewish leaders have concealed this information.[74] Concerning a series of four occurrences of *muṣaddiq* in the passage Q 2:89–101, the exegete writes that the recitation sent down to Muḥammad declares the truth of what is in "the books that were before it" about Muḥammad and his prophethood.[75] Muqātil's interpretations of covenant and confirmation link ancient past with Muslim story very effectively, and the Torah functions as a constant between them. In this connection, it is surely significant that while the word "Torah" does not appear at all in the first two *sūra*s of the Qur᾿ān, Muqātil names the Jewish scripture explicitly some 58 times in his exegesis of Q 2:1–159.[76]

Outlines of the Overarching Story

All of the exegetical devices described above—anecdote, occasion of revelation, identification, characterization, personification and liaison—are literary techniques. By using these techniques in order to explain the meanings of passages of scripture which do not seem to contain any explanatory context, Muqātil skillfully provides them with sense and coherence by constructing an overarching narrative framework. The structure which he establishes at the beginning of the commentary, in his exegesis of Q 2:1–162, continues to serve him as he proceeds to explain the rest of scripture.

If there is indeed an overarching narrative framework at work in Muqātil's commentary, what is the story? In its largest dimensions, the story is that God acted in history through an Arabian prophet named Muḥammad.[77] Muḥammad was sent as a true prophet of God, and

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[72] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101.

[73] Uri Rubin has investigated the theme of biblical "attestation" of the prophet of Islam in a wide variety of early Muslim works in his *The Eye of the Beholder: The life of Muḥammad as viewed by the early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1995), 21–43.

[74] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101.

[75] At Q 2:89, 91, 97 & 101.

[76] First at Q 2:4. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 84.

[77] Scholarly expressions referring to this story include, "…the sequence of world events centered on the time of Muhammad was directed by God." Rippin, "Literary analysis of Qur᾿ān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*," 154; and "…the spiritual, intellectual, and

God revealed his word through this particular prophet in recitations called the Qurʾān.[78] Further, the Muslim story specified that "God's salvific design had been achieved only with the revelation granted Muḥammad."[79]

This outer framework can then be segmented into a number of subordinate structures or patterns. For example, one of the best-known patterns of the story is the response to Muḥammad from the Arab "associators" in Makka.[80] The strongest narrative pattern in Muqātil's exegesis of Q 2:1–162 and of the tampering verses in general is the Jewish response—and primarily resistance—to religious claims surrounding the prophet of Islam. In this subplot, the Jewish response is represented by the Jews of Madīna during the career of Muḥammad in that city. The Jews are portrayed as possessing scripture which prophesies the coming of a prophet. This should have prepared them to receive Muḥammad readily, and indeed one element in the story is that the Jews were hoping for military deliverance from hostile Arabs through the coming of the prophet.[81] But while a few Jews respond with integrity to the appearance of the prophet of Islam on the basis

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social transformation brought about by the mission (*mabʿath*) of an Arabian prophet." Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 7.

[78] Muqātil signals this very early on in his exegesis of the second Sūra, in his explanation of the unspecified doubt and belief referred to there. At Q 2:2: that the Qurʾān "came from God and he sent it down upon Muḥammad." At Q 2:3: "they believe in the Qurʾān that it came from God most high and that he sent it down upon Muḥammad." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 81. Frequently in the subsequent commentary, Muqātil uses these and similar phrases to identify the unspecified objects of doubt, belief and unbelief.

[79] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 109.

[80] Wansbrough found four "stages" in what he described as the "emergence of the Islamic kerygma" in the *Sīra*: "(a) initial proclamation, (b) pagan rejection, (c) opportunist and hypocritical submission, (d) Jewish rejection." *Sectarian Milieu*, 23. In the passages of Muqātil's commentary investigated in this study, Wansbrough's fourth 'stage' is by far the most prominent. Rudolf Sellheim wrote about three layers or *Schichten* in the *Sīra*, and considered the middle layer ("prophetical legend") to be the one related to Jews and Christians. "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte," 48, 53f.

[81] Muqātil tells this story at Q 2:89, where the scriptural phrase is "they aforetimes prayed for victory over the unbelievers." He explains that the Jews used to pray for assistance through the emergence (*khurūj*) of Muḥammad against the idolatrous Arabs. The Jews said that they found the prophet in their book and that they anticipated his help. Muqātil writes, "Then when God, powerful and exalted, sent Muḥammad (PBUH) from outside of the Children of Israel, they disbelieved in him [though] they recognized him." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 122. On the connection of Q 2:89 with Muslim traditions about Jewish knowledge of the coming of a prophet, see Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 29; and Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 5–6, 16.

of the prophecies in their possession, the leaders of the Jews and the larger part of the Jewish population reject him out of a variety of evil motives, including obstinacy.[82] The issue which arises repeatedly in anecdotes is whether the Jews will acknowledge the prophethood of Muḥammad, will attest that the recitations he speaks are from God, and will believe in and obey him. A central concern, therefore, is the authority of the prophet of Islam. The story continues into a phase of deteriorating relationships between Muḥammad and the Jewish tribes of Madīna, which includes Jewish treachery against the prophet of Islam and a series of harsh Muslim responses to the tribes.[83]

Functions of the External Framework

Wansbrough made the claim that the narrative framework has a number of literary functions. The narrative framework, he wrote, both provides a setting for commentary on the text of scripture and serves to emphasize the Hijāzī background to Islam.[84] The text of the Qurʾān is referential, allusive and elliptical. Verses of the Qurʾān repeatedly leave open the questions of who is the subject of the action, who or what is the object, and indeed what kind of action is envisaged. The scriptural contexts of the verses seldom provide further clues. As a result, apart from extensive commentary many verses of the Qurʾān appear meaningless. The narrative framework supplies a context from outside of the text of scripture and lends coherence to the individual verses.

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[82] Rippin describes this pattern as "the continual motif of Jewish rejection of the alleged prognosis of Muḥammad/Aḥmad in the Torah." "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 4.

[83] In Marco Schöller's summary of the story of the prophet's conflict with the Jews according to al-Kalbī, the phase of Jewish treachery and especially harsh Muslim responses appears to be paramount. "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr*: Muḥammad al-Kalbī on the Jews of Medina," in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, Harald Motzki, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 23–25. Schöller suggests that many aspects of al-Kalbī's version match the "orthodox" account of Ibn Isḥāq (p. 24).

[84] *Quranic Studies*, 123. See also Rippin: "The integration of the text [of the Qurʾān] with the stories of the prophets of the past (primarily Biblical) in the material known as the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 'stories of the prophets,' and with the story of the life of Muḥammad as embedded in books of *Sīra* ('life story') such as that of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767) was designed both to prove the theological fact of the reality of revelation and to provide a context for interpretation for an otherwise historically opaque text." *Muslims*, 42–43.

Use of the narrative framework by Muqātil "compels the reader to accept the Qurʾān document as a source for the life of Muhammad and thus for conditions in the Hijaz during the seventh century."[85] With his choice of the verb 'compel,' Wansbrough implied that the narrative framework has power to influence meaning. He followed up this suggestion with a comment on the relationship of 'the story' to the text of scripture within Muqātil's commentary: "…it may be said of [Muqātil] that the scriptural text was subordinate, conceptually and syntactically, to the narratio."[86] If the narrative framework was indeed paramount in Muqātil's commentary, even to the point of subordinating the words of the Qurʾān, then it is also able to influence the treatment of individual themes and motifs such as tampering with earlier scriptures.

Narrative method, the elements of haggadic exegesis, and arguably the influence of narrative on exegesis did not end with Muqātil. Not only did the narrative approach continue in exegetical literature, but it can be found in genres as diverse as *hadīth, Sīra, maghāzī* and *ayyām*. "The substance of Bukhārī, Muslim and Tirmidhī," claimed Wansbrough, "is that of Muqātil, Sufyān, and Kalbī. It is also that of the entire exegetical tradition, excluding the masoretic literature, up to and including Suyūṭī."[87] Calder specified that the second exegete in this study was also part of this tradition: "From Ṭabarī to Qurṭubī, no exegete within the Sunnī tradition relinquishes the story."[88] In his article on the history of trends in *tafsīr*, Calder gave examples of how Ṭabarī appeared to resolve many exegetical questions—or at least make his choice of preferred interpretation—on the basis of narrative.

One of the important questions to be asked following the exploration of the operation of the narrative framework in the exegesis of the tampering verses is this: To what extent did narrative considerations determine the meaning of the verses of the Qurʾān in Ṭabarī's

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[85] *Quranic Studies*, 123. Cf. Rippin: reports of the occasions of revelation were employed out of a desire "to historicize the text of the Qurʾān in order to be able to prove constantly that God really did reveal his book to humanity on earth." "The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*," 2.

[86] *Quranic Studies*, 127.

[87] *Quranic Studies*, 183.

[88] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 119. Walid Saleh finds that story is also used extensively in the commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), and calls it "a distinctive mark" of the exegete's approach. Saleh coins an expression, "fictive narratives," for narrative interpretations which have no clear basis in the verses being interpreted. *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 162, 161.

commentary? The question is further focused by a remark in *Quranic Studies*. "Formally haggadic elements in the exegesis of Ṭabarī and his successors," wrote Wansbrough, "were functionally of another order, and had been adapted to a different set of priorities."[89] What are the differences between the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī in relation to narrative exegesis? How do these differences affect their development of the tampering motif?

The Narrative Framework in the Exegesis of the Tampering Verses

The narrative patterns revealed in Muqātil's commentary on Q 2:1–162 are also at work in the exegesis of the tampering verses by both Muqātil and Ṭabarī. Chapters four and five described the contents of these passages in the commentaries and analyzed their development of the meanings of the Qurʾānic vocabulary of tampering. This section analyzes the same passages for their indications of a larger narrative framework looming over the exegesis of the particular verses. It also enquires as to whether the exegetical devices seen to operate in Muqātil's exegesis of Q 2:1–162 carry through in the exegetes' explanations of the tampering verses. It concludes by posing the question of whether the narrative framework thus erected can be seen to exert an influence on the exegesis of the tampering verses.

Indications of the narrative structure of Jewish response highlighted in this section include the predominance of 'the matter of Muḥammad' as the object of tampering; the interpretation of 'covenant' to mean a divine stipulation to believe in and follow Muḥammad; the exegesis of the 'confirmation' of the earlier scriptures to mean Muḥammad's attestation of their authority; the profusion of the vocabulary of Jewish resistance; and the tendency to personify paradigmatic response, especially in the commentary of Muqātil. Each feature will be examined for the contribution it makes to the narrative framework.

Narrative indications are first explored in the commentaries' tampering passages already described and analyzed in chapters four and five. Verses from the Qurʾān containing keywords which seem to interact with the narrative currents are noted. The indications are then

[89] *Quranic Studies*, 146.

traced through other exegetical materials such as the contexts of the tampering passages in the commentaries.

The Matter of Muḥammad

The narrative pattern which dominates the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī is the response of the Jews of Madīna to the claims from and about Muḥammad. One of the most important indicators of this influential pattern is the frequency of identification of the object of tampering as the description of the Arabian prophet in the Torah. This expression occurs repeatedly in various forms. Often the object of tampering is simply "Muḥammad."[90] Muqātil most frequently mentions the *amr* ('matter')[91] of Muḥammad, then his *naʿt* ('description'),[92] his *ṣifa* ('characteristics'),[93] his *baʿth* ('sending')[94] and its *bayān* ('declaration').[95] Ṭabarī and his chosen authorities use all of these expressions,[96] and add the *maʿrifa* ('knowledge')[97] of Muḥammad, his *mabʿath* ('mission'),[98] his *nubūwa* ('prophethood'),[99] his *shaʾn* ('matter'),[100] his *ism* ('name'),[101] and his *dhikr* ('mention').[102]

The matter of Muḥammad is the main object of tampering in the commentaries. Muqātil finds it to be the object of tampering in two of the four *ḥarrafa* verses, and in seven of the eight *katama* passages. Ṭabarī concludes that the matter of Muḥammad is not the object of tampering in the *ḥarrafa* verses. However, at Q 2:75 he claims

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[90] Ṭabarī at Q 2:42, 2:146, 2:159, 3:187 and 4:37.

[91] Muqātil at Q 2:41, 2:42, 2:44, 2:76, 2:140, 2:174, 3:71, 3:73, 3:78, 3:187, 4:37, 5:15 and 6:91.

[92] Muqātil at Q 2:16, 2:42, 2:44, 2:79, 3:70, 3:72, 3:78 and 4:37. "The substantive *naʿt* is used [in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*] only in the specific meaning of 'characteristics of the Prophet.'" Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 140.

[93] Muqātil at Q 4:46.

[94] Muqātil at Q 2:41.

[95] Muqātil at Q 2:44, 4:46.

[96] Ṭabarī: *amr* at Q 2:42, 2:140, 2:146, 2:159, 2:174, 3:71, 3:187, 4:37 and 6:91; *naʿt* at Q 2:42, 2:75, 2:77, 2:79, 3:71 and 4:37; *ṣifa* at Q 2:42, 2:75, 2:140, 2:159, 4:37 and 5:41; *baʿth* at Q 2:42 and 2:174; *bayān* at Q 2:27 and 2:159.

[97] Ṭabarī at Q 2:42.

[98] Ṭabarī at Q 2:77, 2:159 and 3:71.

[99] Ṭabarī at Q 2:77, 2:159, 2:174, 3:71, 3:187 and 6:91.

[100] Ṭabarī at Q 2:174 and 3:71.

[101] Ṭabarī at Q 2:79, 2:174, 3:187 and 4:37.

[102] Ṭabarī at Q 6:91.

that this is exactly the information which the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna would be likely to tamper with.[103] As noted in chapter five, all of Ṭabarī's *katama* passages mention the matter of Muḥammad. At Q 2:79, both Muqātil's explanation and Ṭabarī's ʿUthmān tradition focus on the description of Muḥammad as the object of Jewish tampering.

The 'matter of Muḥammad' assumed by these exegetes to be found in the earlier scriptures are the assertions that Muḥammad is a true prophet and apostle, that what he is reciting is in fact a revelation sent down from God, and that the Jews had made a covenant with God that they would believe in Muḥammad and obey him.[104]

The scriptural warrant for this conviction that Muḥammad will be found in the former scriptures is not spelled out in the first five *sūras* of the Qurʾān. However, Q 7:157 contains the phrase which the exegetes frequently use in their statements of the location and object of tampering: "…those who follow the messenger the prophet *al-ummī* whom they find written in what is already in their possession,[105] in the Torah and the Injīl" (*yajidūnahu maktūban ʿindahum fī 'l-tawrāt wa 'l-injīl*).[106] In explaining this verse, Muqātil does not advance a text from the earlier scriptures to support this claim,[107] but Ṭabarī transmits a substantial tradition about Muḥammad's description in the Torah from ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr [ibn al-ʿĀṣ]:

> He is described in the Torah with his Qurʾānic characteristics, "O prophet, we have sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings, and a warner, and a refuge for the gentiles (*ummiyyūn*). You are my servant and my messenger; I have named you 'the trusting.' He is not harsh nor rough nor crying in the streets (*aswāq*); he does not reward evil with evil, but pardons and forgives. We will not take him until by him we have caused the crooked people to say, 'There is no god except Allah,' and by him we have opened the uncircumcised hearts, the deaf ears and the blind eyes."[108]

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[103] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 248. Similarly at Q 5:41—though the main object of tampering is the stoning verse in the Torah—the Jewish denial of the prophethood of Muḥammad is still in view. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 316.

[104] Muqātil at Q 2:2–4, 2:42, 2:88, 2:90, 2:101, etc. Muqātil also claims that the Torah declares that Muḥammad's religion is Islam. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 131 (at Q 2:109).

[105] Madigan's translation of *ʿindahum*. *The Qurʾân's Self-Image*, 116.

[106] Cf. Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 372.

[107] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 67.

[108] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 164 (trad. 15225). The first part of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr's quote matches Q 33:45 and resembles 48:8. See also Watt's translation of Ibn Saʿd's version of the tradition. "The Early Development," 57–8. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*

Ṭabarī writes that ʿAṭāʾ ibn Yasār, who heard this Torah passage recited, then met Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and asked him for verification. Kaʿb replied that the quote was correct except for the grammatical forms of the adjectives in the last phrase.[109]

Another Qurʾānic locus for the conviction that Muḥammad's description is to be found in the earlier scriptures is Q 61:6, where ʿĪsā ibn Maryam is quoted as saying, "Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be *aḥmad*." These 'good tidings' from ʿĪsā were assumed to be found in the Injīl. In his *Tafsīr*, Muqātil writes that *aḥmad*, "in the Syriac language," is "*fāraqlīṭā*."[110]

The culpability of the Jews of Madīna for not responding favorably to the appearance of the prophet of Islam is based in the commentaries on the assumption that they know the information about Muḥammad in the Torah in their possession. Ṭabarī expands on this assumption by claiming that not only did the Jews have this information with them, but that they were the only ones privy to this information. "The prophethood of Muḥammad (PBUH) and his characteristics and his sending were only with (*ʿinda*) the People of the Book and no others (*dūna ghayrahum*)."[111] In this and many other statements, the exegetes freely use the expressions "with them/you" (*ʿindahum/kum, maʿahum/kum*) or "between their hands" (*bayna aydīhim*). These indeed are scriptural expressions. The effect of the repetition of these phrases in the com-

al-Kubrā (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), Vol. I, 360–361. Wensinck discussed al-Wāqidī's version in his *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, Second edition. Wolfgang H. Behn, trans. and ed. (Berlin: Adiyok, 1982), 40–41. Bukhārī connects the tradition with Q 48:8. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. VI, 44–45 (*kitāb al-tafsīr*, bāb 273).

[109] Which, from a literary perspective, lends a touch of verisimilitude to the tradition. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 164 (trad. 15225). Further to Q 7:157 and treatments of the verse by Muqātil and Ṭabarī see Isaiah Goldfeld, "The Illiterate Prophet (*nabī ummī*): An Inquiry into the Development of a Dogma in Islamic Tradition," *Der Islam* 57 (1980), 67; McAuliffe, "The Qurʾānic Context," 149–150; and *idem.*, "The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad," 116–119.

[110] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. IV, 316. Cf. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 23, on Muqātil's exegesis and his remark: "This indicates that the identification of the Quranic ʿAḥmad' with the Paraclete of the New Testament is much earlier than is usually assumed by modern scholars." Further on 61.6 and its exegesis by Muqātil, Ṭabarī and others see McAuliffe, "The Qurʾānic Context," 151, 158 n. 65; and *idem.*, "The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad," 119–120.

[111] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 251 (at. Q 2:159). As noted in chapter five (p. 160), Ṭabarī signaled this claim already at Q 2:40–41. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 554, 563.

mentaries is to make the Jews' rejection of the truth of Muḥammad's prophethood very personal, even tactile, and to accentuate their culpability and obstinacy.[112]

The function of this narrative element in the larger framework is to focus attention on the Jewish response to the prophet of Islam. According to the commentaries, Muḥammad is indeed prophesied in the scriptures which the People of the Book have in their possession. The reader/listener of the commentaries ʿknows' this information. The precise form of the prophecies is left somewhat mysterious. In the terms of the Muslim story, some of the characters who are familiar with the earlier scriptures respond appropriately to what they read there. But a larger number of characters choose to disregard that information. The People of the Book are thus clearly culpable in the story for a negative response to Muḥammad. Those who do not disclose the matter of Muḥammad are shown to be liars or tamperers.[113]

Part of the Covenant

The culpability of the Jews for their negative response to Muḥammad is further dramatized in the commentaries by the assertion that God's

[112] Daniel Madigan writes, "*Ahl al-kitāb* should probably be understood as those who have been given not *possession of* but rather *access to* and *insight into* the knowledge, wisdom and sovereignty of God for which the very fluid term *kitāb* serves as a symbol." "Book," 247 (Madigan's italics). Whether this is the meaning of the Qurʾān or not, and whether or not therefore scriptural expressions such as "with them" and "between their hands" are to be understood metaphorically, this does not seem to be the understanding of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, nor does it seem to match the dynamic of the narratives they offer.

[113] It is worth noting that in none of the commentary passages investigated in this study is the object of tampering Jewish and/or Christian creedal statements which later became the standard themes of medieval polemic. Neither does there appear to be a significant concern for the actual contents and textual condition of the earlier scriptures, as there would be later with Ibn Ḥazm and his followers. There is indeed mention of *qibla*, Abraham, the stoning verse, legal prescriptions (the 'permitted and forbidden'), and other objects of tampering. But by far the most frequent object of tampering is information about Muḥammad. This appears to be based not on a demonstration of familiarity with the contents of the earlier scriptures themselves, but rather on the Qurʾānic assertion that the messenger and *ummī* prophet can be found "written down with them in the Torah and Gospel" (Q 7:157). (Jane McAuliffe notes that Ṭabarī "shows no evidence of actually having seen the New Testament texts." "The Qurʾānic Context," 145.) Another observation on Ṭabarī's minor objects of tampering is that the focus of concern with the *qibla*, the ruling on adultery, and the "effacing" of Jewish prohibitions, is the authority of the prophet of Islam. The state of the text of the Torah does not seem to come into view.

covenant with the Jews in the past included the stipulation that they believe in and obey the prophet of Islam when he would be sent. The theme of covenant and its connection to the tampering motif appears in the tampering passages of the exegetes especially at Q 5:13 and 3:187. That the exegetes would be inclined to discuss the covenant God made with Israel in these passages is clear from the surrounding context in the Qurʾān. Both verses contain the keyword (*mīthāq*); Q 5:12 specifies that the covenant is with the Children of Israel, and that the stipulations of God himself included the command to believe (*āmana*) in his messengers and support (*ʿazzara*) them.

There are other passages in Muslim scripture which make possible the exegetical connection of the covenant to the response to Muḥammad, and these may have been in the minds of the exegetes as they explained the tampering verses. In Q 3:81, God makes a covenant with the prophets in which he commands them: "I have given you of book and wisdom; then there shall come to you a messenger confirming what is with you—you shall believe (*āmana*) in him and you shall help (*naṣara*) him."[114] The prophets then promise to do so. Also in Q 7:157, right after the claim that the *ummī* prophet is recorded in the Torah and Gospel, comes the promise, "Those who believe (*āmana*) in him and support (*ʿazzara*) him and help (*naṣara*) him, and follow (*ittabaʿa*) the light that has been sent down with him—they are the prosperers."

Muqātil's exegesis of the first appearances of "covenant" at Q 2:27 and 2:40 was noted in chapter four. Ṭabarī likewise first raises the covenant theme at Q 2:27, but moves considerably beyond Muqātil in describing the contents of the covenant. The covenant imposed upon the People of the Book in the Torah was to follow (*ittibāʿ*) Muḥammad when he was sent forth, and to attest to the truthfulness (*taṣdīq*) of both the messenger and of what he brought from their Lord.[115] The Jewish religious leaders were to make his affair clear to the people, and not conceal it. And his affair in the scriptures included the information "that he was a messenger from God to whom obedience (*ṭāʿa*) has been prescribed."[116] At Q 2:40, Ṭabarī specifies that the literate Jewish rabbis were required by God to announce "that they find him written

[114] On Q 3:81 and "the covenant with the prophets" see Jeffery, "The Qurʾān as Scripture," 127–9.
[115] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 411.
[116] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 413.

with them in the Torah as the prophet of God, and that they believe in him and in what he brought from God."[117] The coupling of obedience to God with obedience to Muḥammad in the ancient covenant so conceived is striking. Another interesting feature of these two passages is Ṭabarī's pattern of cross-reference: at Q 2:27 he refers ahead to 2:40, and quotes 3:178; at Q 2:40 he quotes 5:12 twice, and offers 7:156–7 and 9:111 as evidence of information about Muḥammad and Islam in the covenant.

Ṭabarī's explanations of covenant also highlight the evil of the Jewish response to Muḥammad by detailing the 'boons' or mercy of God in his dealings with Israel in the past. At Q 5:13, after providing a formulaic recital of the gracious things which God did, he writes that the Jews still broke the covenant. Ṭabarī concludes his paraphrase: "If this is what their best people did, in spite of my kindness to them, don't be surprised if their low people do the same thing."[118] Here the Jewish failure to respond positively to Muḥammad is not an understandable reaction to a cruel and tyrannical deity, but rather is an unaccountable rebellion against a God who only treated them kindly.

The theme of tampering thus fits into a larger narrative framework in which a concept of covenant is at work. According to the Muslim narrative, the earlier scriptures contain the record of a binding contract between God and the Children of Israel. Among the stipulations of that covenant is belief in, support of, and obedience to Muḥammad when he appears. *Taḥrīf* is the action of concealing those particular stipulations, not publicizing them to the common people, and/or refusing to act upon what God has commanded. Therefore, the Jews are clearly culpable, and the curse of God rests upon them. The concept that the Children of Israel are breaking an ancient divine covenant in their response to Muḥammad gives narrative depth and 'historical' authenticity to the exegetes' portrayal of the deceitfulness and treachery of the Jews.

The function of this narrative element in the larger framework is to introduce a note of dramatic and moral tension into the story of the response to Muḥammad's claims. Not only are the Jews responding negatively to the prophet while in possession of scriptural attestation to his prophethood. They are also defying God by breaking an

[117] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 557.
[118] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125, cf. 130–131.

agreement he had made with them before the prophet appeared. This double culpability makes the Jews especially worthy of God's chastisement and curse—expressions which appear frequently in both Qurʾān and commentaries. That the Jews have been evil and disobedient in the past is in this Muslim narrative a matter of common knowledge. Now in their response to Muḥammad they are shown to be acting in character. They have lost God's favor by breaking their covenant with him in past and present. The proof of that covenant is to be found in the book with which they are tampering.

A Link of Correspondence

Another indication of a larger narrative framework surrounding the tampering motif is the theme of correspondence between the earlier scriptures and the recitations of the prophet of Islam. The Qurʾānic material on this claim was surveyed in chapter three. Exegesis of this material in the commentaries tends to accentuate the guilt of the Jews by showing them to be denying a link of confirmation between their own scriptures and the words of Muḥammad. When the term *muṣaddiq* first appears at Q 2:41, Ṭabarī glosses the scriptural phrase "in confirmation of what is with you" as "the *qurʿān* confirms what is with the Jews of Banū Isrāʾīl of the Torah."[119] He explains that the Qurʾān, the Torah and the Gospel intersect precisely in the command to acknowledge (*iqrār*) the prophethood of Muḥammad, to attest (*taṣdīq*) him and to obey (*ittibāʿ*) him. This command is in all three scriptures, writes Ṭabarī, so if the Jews attest to what was sent down to Muḥammad, they attest to the Torah as well.[120] In his exegesis of the phrase "what is with you," Ṭabarī is straightforward in saying that the Torah and the Gospel are with the Jews, and he cites a tradition which claims, "they find Muḥammad…written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel."[121]

Ṭabarī provides further explanation of *muṣaddiq* at several other occurrences of the term in Sūras 2–6. At Q 4:47 he glosses "confirming" as *muḥaqqaq*,[122] with the sense of verifying or substantiat-

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[119] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 560.
[120] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 560–561.
[121] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 561 (trad. 816).
[122] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 440.

ing. He offers an interesting discussion of the scriptural term with which *muṣaddiq* is set in parallel at Q 5:48, *muhaymin*.[123] Ṭabarī and a large number of traditions provide a variety of glosses for *muhaymin* ('guarding it in safety'): providing evidence (*shahīd*) that it is true and from God, assuring (*amīn*) it, guarding (*ḥāfiẓ*) it, supervising (*raqaba*) it, and entrusted (*muʾtaman*) with it. The Qurʾān does not contradict (*khālafa*) the Torah which God sent down on Moses, which is guidance and light.[124] All of these expressions indicate a concept of the trustworthiness of the earlier scriptures.

An anecdote which Ṭabarī transmits in his explanation of *muṣaddiq* at Q 2:97 gives a good idea of the spirit of much of the material on the earlier scriptures in his commentary. In a tradition attributed to al-Shaʿbī, ʿUmar tells about being present with the Jews on the day of their study (*midrās*) and being amazed "at how the Torah confirmed the truth (*taṣdīq*) of the *furqān*, and how the *furqān* confirmed the truth of the Torah."[125] ʿUmar presses the Jews to say whether they know (*ʿalima*) that Muḥammad is the messenger of God. One of their learned and important men answers—though once more only because he has been adjured before God!—that they do indeed know that Muḥammad is the messenger of God. ʿUmar then expresses amazement a second time: If they know that he is the messenger of God, why do they not follow (*tabiʿa*) him and attest to (*ṣaddaqa*) him?[126]

The claim that Muḥammad is confirming God's earlier revelation also comes out strongly in the exclamation of triumph which the prophet of Islam makes at the end of the 'stoning verse' narratives. This exclamation is worded variously in the different accounts: In Muqātil's *tafsīr* Muḥammad says, "I am the first to revive one of the *sunnas* of God."[127] Ṭabarī's commentary offers two expressions, the first addressed to God: "O God, I am the first who revived your command" (al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzib); and the second a claim of self-identity: "I impose (*qaḍā*) what is in the Torah" (Abū Hurayra). Taken together, these exclamations show a striking concern to portray continuity between

[123] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 377–382. *Muhaymin*, "guarding it in safety," is one of the terms which the Qurʾān uses for the relationship of the recitation to the Torah.

[124] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 530 (at Q 6:92).

[125] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 381 (trad. 1608).

[126] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 381.

[127] Ibn Isḥāq's version of the exclamation begins the same way as Muqātil's but then includes a reference to the *kitāb* of God: "I am the first to revive the order of God and his book and to practise it." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406.

the ruling in the Torah and the ruling of the prophet of Islam. These stories authenticate the claim of Muḥammad's true prophethood by demonstrating that the judgment he gives on a difficult legal problem lines up with God's judgment contained in the Torah.[128]

The prophethood of Muḥammad in both commentaries, therefore, is based upon the alleged continuity of his recitations with the revelations of the past, rather than upon a claim of discontinuity because those scriptures had been previously falsified.[129] The problem in focus in the exegesis of Q 5:41 is that the earlier scriptures are not being applied, and the prophetic authenticity of Muḥammad is demonstrated through his act of reviving divine rulings contained therein. The narrative is clearly more concerned to show continuity than to suggest corruption.

The function of this narrative element in the larger framework is to further accentuate the depth of perversity in the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad. According to the commentaries, the prophet of Islam rules in accordance with the Torah. This authenticates the Muslim claim that Muḥammad is a true prophet of God. The Torah is drawn into the story as the locus of evidence for that claim. It is not portrayed as a symbol of Jewish falsification. Quite the contrary. Its role is as a source of authority—indeed as the only possible authority whereby a claim to prophethood can be judged.[130] As such, the theme of cor-

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[128] At Q 5:44, ʿAbd al-Razzāq finds the prophet of Islam to say, "I impose (*ḥakama*) what is in the Torah." ʿAbd al-Razzāq adds, after reporting Muḥammad's exclamation of triumph, that he is one of the "submitted" prophets who make judgments according to the Torah. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, Vol. I, 185. Vajda indicated that in the *ḥadīth* versions of Muslim and Ibn Māja, Muḥammad exclaims, "God, I am the first to revive your command after they killed it." "Juifs et Musulmans selon le ḥadīṯ," 96. These understandings of Muḥammad's exclamation persisted at least into the fifth Islamic century. In his *sabab al-nuzūl* for Q 5:41–47, al-Wāḥidī reports Muḥammad saying, "O God, I am the first to revive your command when they let it perish." *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 101. And in a second *sabab*, for Q 5:44, the prophet of Islam says, "I judge by what is in the Torah." *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 102.

[129] "The main polemical argument used in response to the Jewish rejection of the Qurʾān revolves around the idea that this scripture confirms the message of the previous scriptures." Uri Rubin, "Jews and Judaism," *EQ* (2003), Vol. 3, 26.

[130] This conclusion is born out in other materials in both commentaries. Significant among these is the exegesis of Q 3:23: "Have you not regarded those who were given a portion of the book, being called to the book of God, that it might decide between them, and then a party of them turned away, swerving aside?" Muqātil finds the meaning of this verse in a story of confrontation between Muḥammad and a group of Jews. At issue is the prophethood of Muḥammad. Muḥammad calls the Jews to the Torah, writes Muqātil, because "I am written (*maktūb*) in it that I am a prophet

respondence deepens the culpability of the Jews for their negative response to the prophet of Islam.

Rich Vocabulary of Resistance

When the exegetes portray the encounter between the Jews and the prophet of Islam, they employ a wide range of vocabulary to describe the response—especially the negative response—of the Jews. Some of this vocabulary echoes the language of the Qurʾān itself.[131] Other descriptions simply gloss the verbs and terms which the Qurʾān employs. But the exegetes go well beyond this word pool to accentuate a set of characteristics which becomes very important in their picture of the Jews. This attempt at characterization is an important indication of the narrative structure looming above the exegesis. Characterization is a literary technique. The profusion of the vocabulary of Jewish response must therefore be seen as one indication of a narrative dynamic at work. This vocabulary is explored according to the increasing degree of evil and culpability on the part of the Jews.

The appropriate response to the claims of Muḥammad is described by the exegetes in the language of recognition, acceptance, belief and obedience. The conversation apparently referred to at Q 4:46 provides the exegetes with an opportunity to articulate this kind of response. The second part of the verse says that the Jews should have said, "We have

and an apostle." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 269. Ṭabarī considers a number of traditions, but prefers the interpretation that Muḥammad called a group of Jews to the judgment of the Torah. Ṭabarī also understood that the disagreement may have concerned Muḥammad's claim to prophethood. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 291. Neither narrative gives the sense of a corrupted Torah or an act of falsification. Rather, the attestation of the prophethood of Muḥammad is assumed to be found in the Torah, but the Jews either conceal the attestation or refuse to act upon its truth. Julian Obermann wrote, "the word of God that had been revealed to the 'people of the Book' is forever reflected in [Muḥammad's] own revelations and referred to as an ultimate source of authority." "Koran and Agada," 23. Steven M. Wasserstrom argues that Jewish and Christian traditions were seen to attest to the truth of Islam. "Israʾiliyyat was an outside witness brought in to testify to the veracity of the new religion. The older religion is called to the witness box to speak on behalf of the new." *Between Muslim and Jew*, 174.

[131] Hirschfeld characterized many scriptural references to the Jews as "abusive titles" and "unflattering epithets." *New Researches*, 105, 106. Radscheit provides an extensive list of the "rich vocabulary" of Qurʾānic terms of opposition to the messenger of Islam in his article, "Provocation," *EQ* (2004), Vol. 4, 309.

heard and obey." Ṭabarī explains this to mean "We heard your saying, O Muḥammad, and we obeyed (*aṭāʿa*) your command, and accepted (*qabila*) what you brought to us from God."[132] Ṭabarī further explains the appropriate response as to believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in Muḥammad and the truth that he brought, and to acknowledge (*qarra*) his prophethood.[133] In other tampering passages, the right response to the truth is to confess it (*iʿtarafa*), as Muqātil reports Ibn Ṣūriyā doing at Q 5:41.[134] Elsewhere Muqātil explains that the Jews acknowledge (*aqarra*) part of the matter of Muḥammad, while hiding the other part.[135]

The language of the Qurʾān allows for the portrayal of appropriate response by indicating that the subjects of the action know (*ʿalima*)[136] or recognize (*ʿarafa*).[137] When the verb is left open-ended, as is frequently the case in scripture, Muqātil tends to specify the object. At Q 2:146, for example, he explains through an anecdote that the Jews know the true *qibla* from their familiarity with the Torah and Injīl.[138] The scriptural *āmana* is frequently glossed with the verb *ṣaddaqa* in both Ṭabarī and Muqātil. In fact, when Muqātil encounters *āmana* without object in the text of scripture, he typically explains it as *ṣaddaqa* in Muḥammad, the Qurʾān, or *tawhīd*.[139] Thus the verbal noun *taṣdīq* also occurs regularly in the commentaries as a term for the proper response to the prophet of Islam.[140]

Unbelief

The first level of negative response to the prophet of Islam is portrayed by the exegetes as unbelief (*kufr*). In their explanations of Q 4:46 and 5:12–14, the commentators understand that the People of the Book fail to believe in Muḥammad. Muqātil writes that the Jews disbelieve (*kafara*) in Muḥammad and what he brought;[141] they disbelieve in ʿĪsā

[132] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 436.
[133] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439. Also *iqrār* at Q 2:77, Vol. II, 256. Cf. Muqātil on Q 2:83: "acknowledge (*qarra*) the sending of Muḥammad." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 120.
[134] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 476.
[135] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284, at Q 3:71 (also at Q 2:42).
[136] Q 2:140, 2:146, 3:71, 3:75, 3:78, 6:114.
[137] Q 2:89, 2:146; Muqātil on 2:76, 2:77, 3:188, 5:83, 6:20.
[138] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 147.
[139] For example, *tawhīd* at Q 2:8; Muḥammad at Q 2:13 & 14; and Qurʾān at Q 2:26.
[140] For example, Ṭabarī at Q 3:71, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504.
[141] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 377, at Q 4:46.

as well.[142] He connects unbelief in Muḥammad with envy on the part of the Jews.[143] Even Ibn Ṣūriyā, who makes an explicit confession of Muḥammad's prophethood in both commentaries, subsequently disbelieves.[144] At Q 2:211, Muqātil links the Jews' unbelief in Muḥammad with their lack of faithfulness to God.[145]

The use of forms of *kafara* in the commentaries to characterise the response of the Jews is extensive. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Muqātil frequently identifies the Jews as the subject of scriptural unbelief.[146] At Q 2:77, two of Ṭabarī's traditions find the object of the Jews' concealment to be their unbelief.[147] Ṭabarī's glossing of *baddala* as *kafara* at Q 2:211 suggests that "unbelief" in the minds of the exegetes belongs within the circle of the actions of tampering.[148]

Duplicity

The Jews are portrayed as dishonest through a wide variety of epithets and anecdotes in the commentaries. The concealing and confounding verses and their contexts bring to the minds of the exegetes many examples of duplicity and prevarication.[149] In explanation of Q 2:76, Muqātil tells of a Jew freely revealing to a Muslim ally that he finds Muḥammad in the Torah. But the Jewish leaders warn the rest of the

142 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461, at Q 5:12.
143 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461, at Q 5:13.
144 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 477, at Q 5:41. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304.
145 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 180.
146 Above, p. 173. For example, at Q 4:47. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 377.
147 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 256–7 (trads. 1350 & 1351).
148 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272–3.
149 McAuliffe writes, "In the catalogue of exegetical amplification…scriptural passages are not always physically hidden. More commonly, silence, a concealing and withholding silence, stands as culprit. Obscuring occurs as an act of omission rather than commission. Jews and Christians deceive their Muslim interrogators by refusing to disclose either their divinely mandated responsibilities or the biblical predictions of Muhammad, by simply falling mute before them." "The Qurʾānic Context," 146. Support for this observation comes frequently in Ṭabarī's commentary, including his early association of *kufr* with concealing (at Q 2:6). "The rabbis among the Jews of Madīna repudiated (*jaḥada*) the prophethood of Muḥammad and kept it secret (*asarra*) from the people, concealing (*katama*) his matter (*amr*), although 'they recognized it as they recognize their sons.' The root of '*kufr*' among the Arabs is 'covering (*taghṭiya*) something.' Thus the night is called a 'concealer' (*kāfir*) because its darkness covers (*taghṭiya*) what it envelops.… Likewise, the Jewish rabbis covered (*ghaṭṭā*) the matter of Muḥammad and hid (*katama*) it from the people, although they knew about his prophethood and had discovered his description (*ṣifa*) in their books." Here Ṭabarī also cross-references one of the *katama* verses, Q 2:159. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 255.

Jews not to mention this to the Muslims.[150] At Q 3:72, Muqātil tells the story of how Jewish leaders find the description of Muḥammad in the Torah in the morning but can't find it at night.[151] Again, Muqātil finds duplicity at Q 3:188, where the Jews say in the presence of both the prophet of Islam and the Muslims that they recognize and believe in Muḥammad; however, "that was not in their hearts."[152]

The language of scripture also seems to encourage the exegetical development of this theme in the frequent occurrence of the word "falsehood" (*kadhib*). At Q 5:41, Muqātil associates falsehood with Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and his companions;[153] at the following verse he glosses the same word as *zūr*.[154] At Q 4:50, Muqātil finds the falsehood to be the alleged Jewish claim, "We are sons of God and his beloved ones."[155] Elsewhere he understands it to be the Jewish unwillingness to reveal the prohibition against "bloodshedding and money snatching" in the Torah,[156] or writing something other than the description of Muḥammad.[157] Muqātil's anecdotes begin to build up a vocabulary of deception.

It is in the commentary of Ṭabarī, however, that the language of duplicity and dishonesty seems to flourish. In addition to *kadhaba*, the exegete uses the verbs *iftarā* ('to invent lyingly,' at Q 2:79), *makara* ('to deceive,' at Q 4:46) and *nāfaqa* ('to dissemble, at Q 2:77). Among the synonyms he gives for 'falsehood' (*kadhib*, Q 2:42 and frequently) are *ifk* (at Q 5:41), *bāṭil* (at Q 3:78), *buht* (at Q 2:75), *zūr* (at Q 2:140) and *firya* (at Q 2:79). Beyond these, Ṭabarī uses the terms *ḥayra* ('confusion,' at Q 5:41) and *khidāʿ* ('duplicity,' at Q 2:77). The Jews of Muḥammad's day, he writes, followed the way of the "lie against God" as their ancestors had.[158]

Duplicity is also indicated in the scriptural words of Q 5:41: "those who say with their mouths, 'we believe,' but their hearts don't believe." In their exegesis of these words, Muqātil and Ṭabarī retail a series of anecdotes about Jewish deviousness and deception. The Jews ask the

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150 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118.
151 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284.
152 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 321.
153 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 474.
154 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 478.
155 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 378.
156 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 285.
157 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 286.
158 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129 (at Q 5:13).

prophet for a judgment while hoping for a ruling other than what they know to be God's command. At the same time they are testing him with evil motives. They want to avoid Muḥammad's question about what is in the Torah. Even their best scholar is portrayed as prepared to prevaricate if not adjured to honesty by a sacred vow. Ibn Ṣuriya finally candidly admits that the Jews do indeed know (*ʿalima*) that Muḥammad is a true prophet, but that they will not follow through on that knowledge because of envy.[159]

The 'rabbinical' test of prophethood employed by the exegetes is a good illustration of a narrative structure designed to demonstrate both the authenticity of the prophet of Islam and the duplicity of his foes. The story about Ibn Ṣūriyā and the three 'qualities' (*khiṣāl*), which Muqātil tells at Q 5:41,[160] has been described and analyzed in chapter four. Wansbrough translated another story about three *khiṣāl* from Muqātil's exegesis of Q 18:9.[161] In that story, representatives of the Quraysh in Makka ask the Jews of Yathrib whether they find Muḥammad in their book. The Jews reply, "We find his description (*naʿt*) as you say."[162] The Quraysh are not happy with the answer, but the Jews add nevertheless, "We find that his own people are those most violently opposed to him, and yet this is the time in which he is to appear."[163] This story portrays the Jews as knowing and acknowledging the authenticity of Muḥammad on the basis of their 'book,' and yet deviously supplying the Quraysh with three questions calculated to trick him.

Denial

Deception moves into active denial of the truth in the commentaries with the frequent occurrence of the verbs *kadhdhaba* and *jaḥada*.[164] At Q 2:79 and 4:44, Muqātil finds the Jewish leaders denying (*takdhīb*) Muḥammad.[165] The expession *takdhīb* carries the sense of a deliberate "giving the lie" to Muḥammad, and appears to function as the

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[159] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 477.
[160] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 477.
[161] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 574–6. *Quranic Studies*, 122.
[162] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. II, 575.
[163] Wansbrough's translation, *Quranic Studies*, 122.
[164] *jaḥada* means "to deny, disacknowledge," and also can take on the sense of being niggardly and avaricious, and "possessing little good." *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 381.
[165] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118–119, 376.

opposite to the action of *taṣdīq*, or "declaring his truth." Muqātil also describes the Jews as deniers (*mukadhdhibūna*) of the Torah at Q 2:159.[166] One Jewish leader even denies that God ever revealed anything to anyone![167]

Muqātil sets *juḥūd* and *takdhīb* in parallel at Q 5:14, in his explanation of what the Christians "used to do" in their various Christological confessions.[168] But the exegete also uses the verb *jaḥada* about the Jews at Q 2:146, where the object of rejection is the truth about the *qibla* revealed in the *kitāb Allāh*.[169] The verbal nouns of the two verbs appear to be used even more frequently in Ṭabarī's commentary. Ṭabarī finds the object of Jewish *juḥūd* and *takdhīb* at Q 5:41 to be the prophethood of Muḥammad.[170] At Q 4:46 he adds to this "what he brought from his Lord."[171] And at Q 2:75, he finds that since the Children of Israel in the past denied God's spoken word, the Jews of Madīna are likely to deny the description of the prophet of Islam in their books.[172] Their crime is the "repudiation (*juḥūd*) of it after they'd know it to be true."[173]

Ṭabarī refers to the intention (*taʿammud*) of the People of the Book to disbelieve in Muḥammad, implying a conscious decision to deny the claims of his truth.[174] The exegete also supplies a third noun of denial, *inkār*, at Q 2:27.[175]

Disrespect

The theme of Jewish disrespect for Muḥammad is highlighted in the commentaries at Q 4:46, where the exegetes attempt to explain the mysterious term *rāʿinā*. Ṭabarī cites a tradition attributed to Qatāda saying that the Jews used to mock (*istahzaʾa*) the prophet of Islam with the use of that term.[176] Ṭabarī and his chosen traditions explain with

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[166] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 153.
[167] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 574 (at Q 6:91).
[168] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 462–3.
[169] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 148.
[170] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.
[171] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439.
[172] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247–8.
[173] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 411 (at Q 2:27).
[174] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 506 (at Q 3:71).
[175] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 411.
[176] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435 (trad. 9703). Similarly ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, Vol. I, 159. Cf. Watt: "a piece of Jewish mockery of Muḥammad." "The Early Development," 52.

a remarkable range of vocabulary that the Jews used to insult (*sabba*) Muḥammad and hurt (*ādhā*) him with abomination (*qabīḥ*),[177] abuse (*shatm*),[178] derision (*istihzāʾ*)[179] and disdain (*istikhfāf*).[180]

The language of disrespect first appears in the Qurʾān at Q 2:14: "When they meet those who believe, they say, "We believe"; but when they go privily to their Satans, they say, "We are with you. We were only mocking (*istahzaʾa*)." Muqātil identifies the subject as the unbelieving Jews, and the object of mocking as "Muḥammad and his companions."[181] The Qurʾān seems to give exegetes the possibility to develop this interpretation at Q 6:10: "Messengers indeed were mocked at before thee; but those that scoffed at them were encompassed by what they mocked at."

Already in the distant past, writes Muqātil, the Jews mocked while substituting a saying for the word which God had commanded them.[182] Their descendents acted the same way toward Muḥammad when they laughed (*ḍaḥika*) at God's similitude of "the spider and the fly."[183]

Envy

The language of envy is very important for connecting the narrative framework of Jewish response with the theme of tampering in the commentaries. As was noted in chapter four, this narrative current appears very early in Muqātil's commentary at Q 2:16, evidently triggered by the phrase, "they who have bought error at the price of guidance." Muqātil writes that the Jews found the description of Muḥammad in the Torah before he appeared, and believed in him. But when God sent him from among the Arabs, "they disbelieved in him out of envy."[184] Muqātil also finds envy to be a motivation of the Jews in his exegesis of Q 5:13, where he explains that though the Jews knew that Muḥammad

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177 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 433.

178 Muqātil uses this term to describe *rāʿinā* at Q 2:104. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 129. See also al-Farrāʾ, *Kitāb maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Vol. I, 69.

179 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 434.

180 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435. "By their simultaneous use of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, with its natural pitfalls of pun and assonance, it should have been easy enough for his Jewish opponents to expose his inspired reinforcement of the Truth, which had been revealed 'before,' to mockery and ambiguity." Julian Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 45.

181 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 91.

182 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 110, at Q 2:58.

183 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 94–95, at Q 2:26.

184 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 91.

was a true prophet from the testimony to him "with them" in the Torah, they disbelieved in him after God sent him out of envy that he was from the descendents of Ismāʿīl.[185] Both Muqātil and Ṭabarī recount the comment of Ibn Ṣūriyā to Muḥammad at Q 5:41, that "the Jews do indeed know that you are a true prophet, but they envy you."[186] Ṭabarī identifies envy as the motivation for Jewish hostility toward God and Muḥammad at Q 2:75,[187] and for Jewish concealment of information about Muḥammad in their scripture at Q 2:159.[188]

Envy is a theme in the Qurʾān at Q 2:90, 2:105, 2:109, and 4:54.[189] Muqātil glosses the "grudging" (*baghyan*) of Q 2:90 as "envying (*ḥasadan*) Muḥammad since he was from the Arabs."[190] At the verse just prior, Muqātil recounts the famous story of the Jews praying that Muḥammad be sent as a messenger to help them fight against the idolatrous Arabs. "Then when God, powerful and exalted, sent Muḥammad…from outside of the Children of Israel, they disbelieved in him [even though] they recognized (*ʿarafa*) him."[191] Also at Q 3:73, 4:54 and 57:29, the People of the Book do not want God to shower his bounty on people outside of their circle. Again, Muqātil finds at Q 3:73 that the reason for the envy toward Muḥammad is "because the prophethood will be among outsiders."[192] One other reference to this theme worth noting is Muqātil's comments just prior to the scriptural phrase at Q 2:97, "Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel." The exegete

[185] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461.
[186] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 476. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304 (trad. 11921), 308.
[187] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249.
[188] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 250 (trad. 2373).
[189] On 'envy' as *Leitwort* in the Qurʾān see Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 16, 17.
[190] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 122.
[191] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 122. Wansbrough discusses the treatment of Q 2:89 and 2:109 in the *Sīra*, and the indication there of Jewish envy, in *The Sectarian Milieu*, 16, 18. This sub-theme that the Jewish tampering action took place only after Muḥammad 'was sent' appears to continue throughout both commentaries. Still at Sūra 98, Muqātil seems to say that there was no problem with the earlier scriptures prior to the appearance of the prophet of Islam. On the scriptural words, "And they scattered not, those that were given the book, excepting after the clear sign came to them" (Q 98:2), Muqātil writes: "Those who disbelieve never ceased agreeing on the truth (*taṣdīq*) of Muḥammad until he was sent, because they had his description (*naʿt*) in their books. When God designated him from the offspring of someone other than Isaac, they disagreed about him." *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. IV, 780. On this particular point Ṭabarī pursues the same line in his interpretation of the verse: "He is saying that when God sent him, they split into groups in their opinions about him." Translations from Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi and Andrew Rippin, eds. and trans., *Classical Islam: A sourcebook of religious literature* (London: Routledge, 2003), 106, 116.
[192] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 284.

claims that the Jews consider Gabriel their enemy because after giving the prophethood exclusively to them, he has now given it to another.[193]

Ṭabarī transmits a variety of traditions about the Jewish expectation of Muḥammad in pre-Islamic times at Q 2:89 and 2:90. Several of them claim that envy of the Quraysh and the Arabs was the motivation for the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad when he appeared.[194] Some of the traditions also reveal how the state of the earlier scriptures was envisioned. The Jews used to pray for Muḥammad's help, saying "O God, send this prophet whom we find written down (*maktūban*) with us."[195] They used to find Muḥammad written down with them in the Torah.[196] They threatened their Arab enemies, "if the prophet whom Moses and Jesus gave good news of—*aḥmad*—came, he would overcome you."[197] Ṭabarī adds his own judgment that the crime of the Jews in this story is their denial (*inkār*) that Muḥammad was the one whose description (*ṣifa*) they found in their book.[198] These stories picture an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews at the time of the appearance of the prophet of Islam. Their narrative logic would be lost if the reader was to assume the corruption of the Torah.

Greed

As seen above, the scriptural phrase "selling for a little price" seemed to trigger many descriptions of the greed of the Jewish leaders in the commentaries. Muqātil offers an explanation which repeats a number of times in his commentary: "an insignificant offer from what the lowly people of the Jews give them every year from their crops and their fruit.... If they had followed Muḥammad...that food would certainly have been withheld from them as a consequence."[199] At Q 2:79, Muqātil identifies greed as the motive of the Jewish leaders for refusing to follow Muḥammad, and correspondingly for erasing his

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193 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 125. Georges Vajda discusses the theme of Jewish jealousy in *sīra* and *hadīth* in "Juifs et Musulmans selon le ḥadīṯ," 85–87.

194 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 335 (trads. 1526, 1525); 336 (trad. 1533). Ṭabarī agrees at Q 2:90 that the motive of the Jews in this story in denying what they knew was envy. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 345.

195 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 335 (trad. 1526).

196 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 335 (trads. 1525, 1527).

197 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 336 (trad. 1533).

198 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 345.

199 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 118–119.

description from the Torah. The same phrase appears in explanations of the motives for concealing a scriptural text.[200]

The scriptural warrant for this exegesis seems to come only at Q 9:34: "Many of the rabbis (*aḥbār*) and monks (*ruhbān*) devour the wealth of mankind wantonly and debar from the way of God. To those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, give tidings of a painful doom." At Q 5:42 there is also a reference to people who "consume the unlawful" (*akkālūna li'l-suḥt*)—which Muqātil glosses as a bribe (*rishwa*).[201] One of the tampering verses, however, contains a verb of greed, *bakhala* (at Q 4:37). There Muqātil finds that the leaders of the Jews are being "niggardly" by commanding the rest of the Jews to conceal the matter of Muḥammad, "out of fear." Most of Ṭabarī's traditions interpret this to be stinginess with the truth about Muḥammad,[202] but a tradition attributed to Ibn Zayd finds it to mean Jewish avarice (*bukhl*) "with what God gave them of income."[203]

Ṭabarī offers a range of vocabulary in his explanations of what he understands the Jewish leaders hoped to gain in exchange for their tampering actions: miserable (*khasīs*) goods from this world (at Q 2:79), bribes (*rishwa*, at Q 2:75), ill-gotten property (*suḥt*, at Q 5:41), an "object of desire" (*ṭamaʿ*, at Q 2:174), illegal earnings (*yaksibūna min al-ḥarām*, at Q 2:79), and "the ephemeral things of this world" (*ḥutām al-dunyā*, at Q 3:78).

Enmity

At the end of his exegesis of Q 2:75, Ṭabarī draws a straight line from the Jews' targetting of animosity (*nāṣaba, ʿadāwa*) toward God and Moses in the ancient past to the hostility and enmity which the Jews of Madīna show toward God and Muḥammad.[204] Enmity becomes an important theme in the exegetes' characterization of the Jews. In Ṭabarī's exegesis of two of the tampering verses, the Jews are described as the "enemies of God."[205]

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[200] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 101, at Q 2:41; Vol. I, 156, at Q 2:174; Vol. I, 320–321, at Q 3:187.
[201] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 478.
[202] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 350–354.
[203] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 352.
[204] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249. See also Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 148.
[205] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536 (at Q 3:78); Vol. VIII, 352 (at Q 4:37).

The language of scripture seems to allow for the development of this theme at Q 4:45: "God knows best your enemies." Muqātil immediately identifies these as the Jews.[206] There is also the explicit statement in Q 5:82: "You will also find the most vehement of mankind in hostility (*ʿadāwa*) to those who believe [to be] the Jews and the associators."[207] Ṭabarī signals the enmity theme very early in his exegesis of the second Sūra, in association with the words, "And some men there are who say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they are not believers" (Q 2:8). He writes that when God established Muḥammad in Madīna, "the learned ones among the Jews displayed malice (*ḍaghāʾin*) towards the messenger of God, and manifested enmity (*ʿadāwa*) and hatred (*shanʾān*) towards him out of jealousy (*ḥasad*) and injustice (*baghī*)—that is, except for a small group of them whom God guided to Islam and who became Muslims."[208]

Rejection

Hostile attitudes are seen to manifest themselves in acts of repudiation in the exegesis of Q 4:46. There the Jews say, "We hear and disobey (*ʿaṣā*)." They should have said, "We hear and obey (*ṭāʿa*)." Both exegetes understand this verse to refer to the Jewish response to the authority of the prophet of Islam, and from such scriptural hints they develop an extensive vocabulary of rejection. They envision a broad range of positions, from a choice not to obey to active defiance of Muḥammad and the Muslims.

It was noted above that the expression "sell for little price" frequently brings to Muqātil's mind the interpretation that if the Jewish leaders had followed (*tabiʿa*) Muḥammad, they would not have received their annual tithe from the Jewish community. Both exegetes

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206 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 376.

207 Marco Schöller writes, "the Jews—both in the Qurʾān and the Islamic tradition—are portrayed as having been the most tenacious antagonists of Muḥammad. . . ." "Opposition to Muḥammad," *EQ* (2003), Vol. 3, 579.

208 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 270. The tone of Muslim scripture at many points seems to suggest that the enmity is mutual. Hirschfeld found, in reference to Q 2:5–15, that "The very first public speeches Mohammad made in Medina breathed so much hatred and hostility that the Jews had everything to fear." "Historical and Legendary Controversies," 109. Georges Vajda wrote that the *ḥadīth* carried the scriptural suggestions forward: "Developing and aggravating the grievances uttered in the Ḳurʾān, Muslim tradition willingly underlines above all the enmity of the Jews." "Ahl al-Kitāb," *EI2* (1960), Vol. 1, 256. See also Vadja, "Juifs et Musulmans selon le ḥadīṯ," 85f.

understand God's covenant with the Children of Israel to have included the stipulation to follow and obey (both *tabiʿa* and *ṭāʿa*) Islam's prophet. In addition to verses like Q 7:157, where the successful will "follow" (*ittabaʿa*) the *ummī* prophet, the exegetes had in their minds the frequent Qurʾānic imperative to "obey (*ṭāʿa*) God and the messenger" (Q 3:32).[209] Indeed, according to Q 4:64, "We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by God's leave."

In spite of God's command, the Jewish response to Muḥammad's authority is characterized by the exegetes through forms of the verb *ʿaṣā* (to disobey, resist, rebel).[210] The scriptural expression "throw behind backs" also brings to the minds of the exegetes the Jewish rejection of authority. Ṭabarī uses the verbs "to refuse" (*abā*, at Q 2:159), "to counteract" (*baṭṭala*, at Q 4:46), "to renounce" (*taraka*, at Q 2:159 and frequently), "to reject" (*rafaḍa*, at Q 2:146), "to oppose" (*ʿāraḍa*, at Q 2:101) and "to abandon" (*zāla*, at Q 5:41), to portray Jewish resistance. The Jews intentionally (*taʿammada*) disobey (*maʿṣiya*) God,[211] and in the same way the religious leaders of both Jews and Christians renounce (*tark*) compliance (*ittibāʿ*) with God's messenger.[212]

Treachery

A dominant note in the exegetes' explanation of Q 5:13 is the theme of Jewish treachery. This is due in part to the occurrence of the term *khāʾina* in the verse, as well as the proximity of Q 5:11 and its traditional association with a story of treachery. Ṭabarī glosses *khāʾina* with the terms *ghadar* ('treason') and *khiyāna* ('faithlessness'), and applies them all to "the people of the Jews Banū Naḍīr, who planned the murder of the apostle of God... and his companions, when the apostle of God... came to them, asking them for help concerning the blood money of the *ʿāmariyyīn*."[213] Ṭabarī explicitly connects this action with the words of Q 5:11, "O you who believe, remember the favour of God to you when certain men formed the design to stretch out their hands

[209] The imperative *aṭīʿū* with God and the messenger as object occurs some 12 times in the Qurʾān. At Q 24:56 the command also occurs with "the messenger" as lone object.

[210] For example in Ṭabarī, *ʿaṣā* at Q 4:46, *ʿiṣyān* at Q 7:162, and *maʿṣiya* at Q 2:146.

[211] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 189 (at Q 2:146).

[212] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 249 (at Q 2:159).

[213] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133.

against you."[214] A tradition attributed to Qatāda deepens the gloss of *khāʾina* with *kadhib* ('falsehood') and *fajūr* ('immorality').[215]

The commentaries also associate a story of Jewish treachery with Q 4:51: "Have you not seen those to whom was given a portion of the book? They believe in sorcery and *al-ṭāghūt* and say to those who disbelieve, 'these are better guided than those who believed in the way.'" At this verse, both Muqātil and ʿAbd al-Razzāq recount the story of the conspiracy of the Madīnan Jews with the Makkan Quraysh to fight Muḥammad after the battle of Uḥud.[216] Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf is the main villain in both commentaries, and Muqātil accompanies him with 30 other Jews.[217]

Obstinacy

Finally, the exegetes characterize the Jews of Madīna as possessing a kind of obstinacy or incorrigibility which sets them beyond the pale. There is abomination (*qabīḥa*) among the Jews, writes Ṭabarī at Q 4:46.[218] The Jews resist the truth even though they have had all the opportunities to know the truth and to respond to it appropriately. Ṭabarī's favorite vocabulary for stubborn resistance is the verb *ʿānada* and the matching adverb *ʿinād*. At Q 2:90, the exegete explains that the Jews deserve God's anger because "they disbelieved in Muḥammad when he was sent, rejected (*juḥūd*) his prophethood, and denied (*inkār*) that he was the one whose characteristics they had found in their book, obstinately opposing (*ʿinādan*) him, grudging him, jealous of him and the Arabs."[219]

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[214] Muqātil offers this narrative in his exegesis of Q 5:11. *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 458–460. Schöller, "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr*," 24, finds this to be one element of the "orthodox" account of the prophet's conflict with the Jews.

[215] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 156 (trad. 11589). ʿAbd al-Razzāq offers the same gloss at Q 5:13. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, Vol. I, 183.

[216] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 378–379. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, Vol. I, 160.

[217] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 378.

[218] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.

[219] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 345. Similar wordings also appear in Vol. II, 450 (*ʿinādan*, at Q 2:91) and Vol. II, 404 (*ʿānada*, at Q 2:101). Leah Kinberg reviews the Qurʾānic use of *ʿanīd* and other terms for stubbornness in her article, "Isolence and Obstinacy," *EQ* (2002), Vol. 2, 541f.

Marco Schöller writes, after studying the narrative pattern of Jewish response to the prophet of Islam in the commentary of al-Kalbī, "the Jews doubted, were won over by obstinacy and did not convert to Islam."[220] Jane Dammen McAuliffe writes that this diagnosis runs strong in the Muslim tradition:

> Although the sources do mention legal or financial motives for scriptural distortion, overwhelmingly they ascribe it to theological obstinacy. Jews and Christians willfully refused to recognize and/or acknowledge the clear descriptions of Muhammad and his advent which were, to translate a Qurʾānic locution literally, 'between their hands (*bayna aydīhim*).'[221]

After giving the Jews this chance, writes Muqātil in his exegesis of Q 5:13, God hardened their hearts against faith in Muḥammad.[222] Again, there are suggestions of hardness of heart in scripture—in Q 5:13 as well as in 2:88 and 2:74: "Then, even after that, your hearts were hardened and became as rocks, or worse than rocks, for hardness."[223] In both Q 2:88 and 5:13, scripture pairs hardness of heart with a curse. Indeed, the exegetes regularly apply the frequent scriptural occurrences of cursing and severe punishment to the Jews.[224] Ṭabarī interprets the curse at Q 4:46 to mean that God has humiliated the Jews, driven them away, and removed good sense from them.[225] At Q 5:13 he writes that God has removed good and success from the Jews, and faith from their hearts.[226]

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220 "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr*," 26. Schöller cites a tradition which al-Kalbī gives at Q 3:12, that the Jews, after acknowledging Muḥammad's prophethood after the battle of Badr, doubted the same after the battle of Uḥud. The Jews subsequently broke their treaty with Muḥammad and Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf went to Makka to incite the leaders there to fight the prophet of Islam.

221 "The Qurʾānic Context," 148. Arent Jan Wensinck sensed the same theme in similar stories about Muḥammad and the Jews transmitted by Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Saʿd. "A great many of these accounts owe their origin to the direct accusation against the Jews who, although they saw the long expected prophet live before them, refused to believe. That these obstinate people received their just punishment on account of this attitude was no more than proper." *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, 39.

222 *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 461. The expression "God has set a seal on their hearts" at Q 2:7 also prompts from Ṭabarī a statement of the incorrigibility of the disbelieving Jewish rabbis. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 266.

223 The motif of 'hardening of the heart' in the Qurʾān and its relationship to comparable imagery in the Bible is explored in Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 72–73.

224 "One of the most frequent invectives against the Jews is that 'God has cursed them.'" Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 106. Of the tampering verses examined in this study, seven contain a curse or punishment.

225 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439.

226 *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 128.

The function of this striking profusion of vocabulary of resistance in the larger narrative framework is to characterize the Jews as a devious and obstinate people. Characterization is a literary technique. Muqātil and Ṭabarī use this technique to lend colour to the narrative they are constructing of Jewish response to the authority of the prophet of Islam. In the terms of such a characterization, would the Jews be more likely to falsify the scriptures in their possession, or merely to conceal the truths in their scriptures and prevaricate?

Personification of Responses to Muḥammad

Muqātil's technique of personifying paradigmatic Jewish responses in his exegesis of Q 2:1–162 was noted earlier in this chapter. That pattern continues throughout his commentary, including in his exegesis of other tampering verses. A good example of the way he contrasts the two types of Jews in his narrative is in his exegesis of Q 3:75. On the sentence, "Of the People of the Book is he who, if you trust him with a hundredweight, will restore it to you," Muqātil writes that this refers to "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions." On the other hand, he identifies "Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and his companions" as the ones who, "if you trust him with one pound, will not restore it to you, unless you stand over him" (Q 3:75).[227]

Muqātil finds Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf to be the major actor in six of the tampering passages examined in chapter four.[228] Kaʿb also appears frequently in the commentary in the immediate contexts of the tampering explanations.[229] At Q 4:51, Muqātil identifies Kaʿb as the mysterious "*al-tāghūt*."[230] There the exegete provides an extensive account of Kaʿb's visit to Makka after the battle of Uḥud, together with Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab and thirty other Jews. Kaʿb makes a deal with Abū Sufyān to fight Muḥammad.[231] Abū Sufyān then asks Kaʿb for some advice about Muḥammad, since "you are men from the People of the Book,

[227] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 285.
[228] At Q 2:146, 2:159, 2:174, 3:78, 4:37 and 5:41 (x4).
[229] For example, at Q 3:72, 3:75, 4:47, 5:42 (x2) and 5:44 (x3).
[230] ʿAbd al-Razzāq specifies *ṭāghūt* at Q 4:51 as both Kaʿb and Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, Vol. I, 160.
[231] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 378.

reading the book." After asking a set of questions, Kaʿb pronounces, "By God, you have better guidance than Muḥammad has."[232]

Treachery is also in view in Muqātil's story of Kaʿb's involvement in the plot of the Banū Naḍīr to kill Muḥammad at Q 5:11.[233] But in this narrative structure, treachery receives its just deserts ("God's curse" at Q 4:52). Muqātil tells the story of the assassination of Kaʿb at the hands of Muḥammad ibn Maslama at Q 4:52[234] and 59:2.[235] He offers this story to explain the meaning of the words, "whomever God curses will not find a helper" (Q 4:52). The story of the assassination of Kaʿb, reported with poetry and great detail in the *Sīra*,[236] thus becomes a parable of earthly recompense for those who oppose the rule of the prophet of Islam.[237]

On the other hand, the example of appropriate Jewish response is given in Muqātil's commentary in the person of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām. At Q 5:13, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions are the exceptional "few" among the Jews who will not act treacherously toward Muḥammad. When Muḥammad adjures Ibn Ṣūriyā to honesty at Q 5:41, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām is the one who stands with the prophet of Islam. At Q 2:130, however, he takes a more active role of actually spreading the faith. There Muqātil tells the story of how ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām invited his nephews Salama and Muhājir to Islam and told them, "Do you not know that God, powerful and exalted, said to Moses, 'I am sending a prophet from the descendents of Ismāʿīl,' saying to him, '*aḥmad* will divert his community away from the fire,' and that whoever denies (*kadhdhaba*) *aḥmad* the prophet is cursed, and whoever does not follow his religion is cursed?"[238] Salama submitted to the call, but Muhājir refused (*abā*) and detested (*raghiba ʿan*) Islam.

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[232] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol I, 379.
[233] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 460.
[234] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 379.
[235] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. IV, 275–6.
[236] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 564–9. Cf. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Vol. II, 31–34.
[237] Uri Rubin, "The Assassination of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf," *Oriens* 32 (1990), 65–71. According to the *Sīra*, "Our attack upon God's enemy cast terror among the Jews, and there was no Jew in Madīna who did not fear for his life." Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 569.
[238] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 139–140.

Muqātil specifies this as the *sabab al-nuzūl* of the phrase, "Whoever shrinks from (*raghiba ʿan*) the religion of Abraham" (Q 2:130).[239]

Compared to Muqātil, Ṭabarī's citing of specific names as the perpetrators of the tampering actions is rare. Two of the traditions he transmits at Q 5:11 find Kaʿb to be involved in the plot to kill the prophet of Islam.[240] But when Ṭabarī discusses the perpetrators of that treachery at Q 5:13, he only indicates the Jews of Banū Naḍīr.[241] Certainly a striking feature of the many versions of the stoning verse story which Ṭabarī recounts at Q 5:41 is the absence of both Kaʿb and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām. Indeed, the exegete gives some space to the question of whether Ibn Ṣūriyā "the one-eyed" was actually involved in the story, as specified in a tradition attributed to Abū Hurayra.[242]

The function of this narrative element in the overall framework is to portray paradigmatic responses to the prophet of Islam in a personal and lively way. Kaʿb represents the Jewish leaders who are well aware of the testimony to Muḥammad in their scriptures and yet transgress that knowledge in every possible way. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām is the symbol of piety and integrity which responds appropriately to the information about Muḥammad in the Torah, believes and follows.

Conclusions

The foregoing detailed examination of tampering passages in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī confirms the impression of the operation of a narrative framework over the exegesis of the individual

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[239] *Tafsīr Muqātil*, Vol. I, 140. The alleged divine intimation to Moses of a prophet to come resembles the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:18, a major prooftext of medieval polemic. Wasserstrom describes the process of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām's portrayal in Muslim tradition as "mythicizing," and suggests that the story of his encounter with Muḥammad was "designed to support the Muslim assertion of a Jewish prophesying and recognizing the coming of Muhammad." *Between Muslim and Jew*, 177.

[240] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 104 (trads. 11562, 11563). While he may not often give the names of the tamperers, Ṭabarī remained free to pass on stories about Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf from his various sources. At Q 3:186, for example, he transmits al-Zuhrī's story of Kaʿb oppressing five men from the Anṣār and insulting Muḥammad in the process. The story ends with Kaʿb's murder. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 58.

[241] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133. Rubin notes that Ṭabarī does not mention the name of Kaʿb in his exegesis of Sūra 59, and attributes this to considerations of chronology. "It seems, that having a sharp 'historical' sense, al-Ṭabarī was aware of the 'fact' that Kaʿb had been killed already after Badr." "Assassination," 70.

[242] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.

tampering verses. That framework was signalled in Muqātil's exegesis of Q 2:1–162, where he also indicated a series of narrative themes. In the explanations of the tampering verses in both commentaries, narrative themes are further filled in with details, and new themes are introduced. It may simply be noted that in the commentary of Ṭabarī, the narrative framework is also signalled both early and extensively.[243]

The themes of the 'matter of Muḥammad,' the covenant in the Torah, and the link of correspondence between Muḥammad and the earlier scriptures all serve to portray the Jews as culpable for not responding appropriately to the information in their possession. The paradigmatic responses personified by Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām similarly focus attention on the acceptance or rejection of the prophet of Islam and the scriptural witness to him. All of these elements relate to the authority of Muḥammad. All of these elements depend for their narrative dynamic on the concept of an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Madīna.

Among the vocabulary of Jewish resistance, the bulk of the characterization paints a picture of a people who make culpable choices on the basis of adequate information. Norman Calder compared Qurʾānic style to a Chinese painting in which a high pagoda or a mountain top is suspended in the sky.[244] The observer, he wrote, is compelled to fill in details to provide a support for the mountain top—though not with just any kind of foundation. "The independent structures of Chinese poetry" inform the observer of exactly how to fill in the emptiness of a Chinese landscape.[245] In Qurʾānic commentary, Calder suggested, the gaps in scripture also need to be filled in according to independent structures. This study has revealed an independent narrative framework of Jewish obstinacy looming over the interpretation of individual verses. Muqātil and Ṭabarī fill in details of Jewish unfaithfulness to an intact Torah to support the Qurʾān's vague, suspended accusation of

[243] A reading of the first volumes of Ṭabarī's commentary reveals passage after passage of characterization of the Jews, using the same word pool of verbs and adverbs. Already at Q 2:4, Ṭabarī writes that the second Sūra, from its beginning, "alludes to a condemnation by God of the unbelievers among the People of the Book, those who claimed to confirm (*muṣaddiq*) what the messengers of God who were before Muḥammad had brought, but who gave Muḥammad the lie (*kadhdhaba*), denied (*jaḥada*) what he brought, and maintained, despite their denial, that they were the rightly guided." *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 248.

[244] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 115.

[245] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 115.

tampering. Some of the verbs and adjectives employed by the exegetes could indeed go well with an accusation of textual falsification. Hostile and treacherous people, for example, are capable of any evil. Greed is associated with an accusation of falsification at Q 2:79. But even these characterizations are used by the exegetes to explain verses where alteration of text is not in view. And the multiple facets of deception, disrespect, envy and rejection are best highlighted by a story of inappropriate response to the truth. This leads to the conclusion that the narrative structure discovered in the commentaries favors the understanding of a variety of other actions of tampering over the accusation of textual falsification.

To continue Calder's image, exegetes are never free to paint in the details arbitrarily, but rather "the filling has to be measured against independent structures."[246] Two internal structures which guide the exegetes are the Qurʾān's own material on the earlier scriptures, and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. An external structure which the foregoing investigation has revealed is the narrative framework of inappropriate Jewish response to the prophet of Islam and to the truth of the Torah. The claim that this narrative framework influences the exegesis of the tampering verses will now be explored, again using an insight from Calder.

In order to test the claim of narrative influence over the exegetical treatment of the tampering theme, the following chapter will bring in a separate Muslim genre. The *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq was written at about the same time as Muqātil's commentary, and Ṭabarī used many materials from Ibn Isḥāq in his *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*. While the two exegetes wrote explanations of continuous scripture into which they incorporated narrative, Ibn Isḥāq wrote a continuous narrative into which he incorporated scripture. Ibn Isḥāq's treatment of the Qurʾānic materials related to tampering promises to provide an indication of the direction in which a narrative of Jewish obstinacy would take the question of the falsification of scriptural text.

[246] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 115.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INFLUENCE OF NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK ON EXEGESIS

The narrative elements described in the preceding chapter reveal the outlines of a narrative structure which looms over the process of interpretation in the commentaries. That narrative structure is concerned with claims of authority for the prophet of Islam and the responses to him from the People of the Book, primarily the Jews of Madīna. This narrative structure in turn exerts an influence on the way in which the exegetes interpret the tampering verses. An external structure brings meaning and coherence to the explanations of the disparate details of the tampering verses. An understanding of this influence makes possible a fuller perception of the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries.

Authority of Narrative Over Dogma

An important illustration of the influence of narrative structures on the development of exegetical themes was provided by Norman Calder in his article, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr." Calder demonstrated the authority of what he termed the "discipline" of narrative to determine exegetical decisions over theological dogma and even prophetic *ḥadīth*.[1] He pointed out the importance of narrative for Ṭabarī in particular, and gave examples from the *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* of how the appeal of story tended to win out over theological considerations—at least those which were already circulating at the time of Ṭabarī. The subject of Calder's exploration was exegetical treatments of Qurʾānic verses about Abraham. The "popular narrative" was that Abraham had lied, and this seemed to bear more weight for Ṭabarī than the doctrine of prophetic sinlessness.[2] The exegete was also familiar with many traditions which favoured Ishmael as the intended victim of Abraham's sacrifice. But Ṭabarī himself preferred to recognize Isaac as the

[1] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 117–118, 108.
[2] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 107–108.

victim—because this was the "established narrative" about Isaac and Jerusalem.[3]

In Ṭabarī's mind, wrote Calder, popular narrative emerged historically prior to theological dogma, and therefore exerted greater authority for the exegete.[4] In the two exegetical situations highlighted by Calder, Ṭabarī knew—and transmitted—a range of opinion which was diverse to the point of contradiction. Over against 17 statements which favored identification of the sacrifice victim as Isaac, Ṭabarī offered 24 statements from "authorities of similar weight and standing" in favor of Ishmael.[5] He had to defend his position against three major rational objections which had arisen to the identification of Isaac.[6] With time, of course, Muslim theological dogma favored the identification of Ishmael, and this view found vigorous exegetical expression in the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr.[7] But even so, Ṭabarī allowed narrative to determine his exegetical decision.

With Calder's analysis in view, and on the basis of the evidence of this study that the obstinacy of the Jews was a reigning narrative theme in the mind of the exegetes, the influence of narrative on the exegesis of the tampering verses can be envisioned. The Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures had not emerged fully by the time of Muqātil or even Ṭabarī, but it was possibly in the process of development. In the absence of a reigning doctrine of the corruption of pre-Qurʾānic scriptures, what sort of shape might the narrative be expected to take?

The need in the narrative is to make a case for the truth of the claims of the prophet of Islam, and to show the Jews as brazenly refusing to acknowledge this truth. In discussing the former scriptures, the exegetes would want to show that the attestation of the prophetic status of Muḥammad can be found in the former scriptures. They will also want to amplify the Qurʾānic claim that the recitations which the Arabic messenger is making confirm what the People of the Book have with them. This would be consistent with Muḥammad's claim in the commentaries that he is reviving the commandments of God. In treating the obstinacy of the Jews, the exegetes would want to show that

[3] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 121–122.
[4] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 108.
[5] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 121.
[6] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 122.
[7] "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 123–124.

the Jews were fully culpable because everything they needed to know in order to make an appropriate response to Muḥammad's claims was right in front of them.

This is indeed largely what happens in the commentaries. The dominant actions of tampering which the exegetes narrate are actions which depend for their narrative dynamic on the presence of an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna.

The Narrative Dynamic of the Sīra

As a test case for the claim of the influence of narrative on the exegetical development of the tampering verses, a survey of the treatment of the earlier scriptures in the *Sīra* serves well. The similarity of the *Sīra* to Muqātil's *Tafsīr*, as well as to the narrative exegesis contained in Ṭabarī's commentary, was noted in chapter four.[8] The presence or absence of the accusation of textual falsification in this early narrative work, and the narrative logic of its presence or absence, will shed light on the narrative dynamic in the commentaries.

The thrust of the extended account of the prophet of Islam in the *Sīra* is that Muḥammad is essentially linked with the line of earlier prophets;[9] indeed, the *Sīra* openly asserts that the coming of Muḥammad is predicted in the earlier scriptures.[10]

There are a number of stories about anticipation of the coming of Muḥammad among various groups of people. According to Ibn Isḥāq, the expectation among the People of the Book comes from having read descriptions of Muḥammad in the previous scriptures.[11] For example, Jewish rabbis and Christian monks had spoken about the prophet of Islam as the time of his appearance drew near. They reported "his description (*ṣifa*) and the description of his time which they found in their scriptures and what their prophets had enjoined upon them."[12] Regarding the Jews, the *Sīra* presents a trio of stories which portray

[8] Above pp. 72–73, 72 (nt. 23). Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 127.

[9] W. Raven, "Sīra," *EI2* (1997), Vol. 9, 661–2.

[10] Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 21–23, 217–218.

[11] Wensinck observed this expectation not only in Ibn Isḥāq, but in other early writers such as Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) and al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823). *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, 39–43. cf. Raven, "Sīra and the Qurʾān," 41.

[12] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 132. English translations from the *Sīra* are frequently indebted to Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*.

Jews predicting the coming of a prophet.[13] The Arabs are inclined to listen, because, "We were polytheists worshipping idols, while they were people of the scriptures with knowledge which we do not possess."[14] Ibn Isḥāq writes that God told Muḥammad that he had made a covenant with the earlier prophets that a messenger would come confirming what they knew.[15] When Christians from Abyssinia came to meet Muḥammad in Makka, they heard him recite the Qurʾān and promptly believed in him. "They recognized (*ʿarafa*) in him the things which had been said of him in their scriptures about his matter (*amr*)."[16] Indeed, the *Sīra* contains one of the earliest Muslim quotations of a text from the Gospel.[17] Ibn Isḥāq quotes a version of the passage John 15:23–16:1, then adds that the Syriac "*munaḥamannā*" (which he says is equivalent to the Greek "*al-baraqlīṭs*") "is Muḥammad."[18] Use of this passage from the Gospel shows a concern for an essential con-

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[13] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 137–139. Wasserstrom refers to "larger cycles of tales" in which non-Muslims prophesy Muḥammad, exemplified in the *Sīra*. *Between Muslim and Jew*, 176.

[14] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 137. In two of the stories, the Arabs are predisposed to accept Islam by the prophecies of the Jews. However, the Jews deny Muḥammad when he appears, in one case out of "wickedness (*baghy*) and envy (*ḥasad*)." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 138. In the third story, the Banū Qurayẓa are warned about the coming of a prophet who "will be sent to shed blood and to take captive the women and children of those who oppose him." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 139.

[15] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 153, quoting Q 3:81.

[16] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 263, connecting it with Q 28:53–55. In the famous story of Baḥīrā, which is found in the *Sīra* at Vol. I, 116–119, the Syrian monk recognizes the prophet of Islam from his description in a book that was in his cell. Ibn Isḥāq does not specify the Gospel, but rather variously describes this source as "his books" and "the Christian books." When other 'People of the Book' also recognize Muḥammad and want to 'get at him,' Baḥīrā warns them off, reminding them of "his mention (*dhikr*) and his description (*ṣifa*) which they would find in the *kitāb*." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 118. A. Abel describes Ibn Saʿd's version of this story in which "the monk knew Muhammad because he had found the announcement of his coming in the unadulterated (*tabdīl*) Christian books, which he possessed." "Baḥīrā," *EI2* (1960), Vol. 1, 922. However, there is no hint of such a distinction in Ibn Isḥāq.

[17] Wansbrough called it the "earliest attestation in Muslim literature" of the technique of citing proof-texts from the earlier scriptures. *Quranic Studies*, 63.

[18] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 152–153. Guillaume makes the case that Ibn Isḥāq's citation is from the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary. "The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina circa 700 A.D.," *Al-Andalus* 15 (1950), 289–296. Sidney H. Griffith notes that Ibn Isḥāq took the freedom to alter the text of John in accordance with Islamic sensibilities. "The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), 138. Interestingly, Ibn Isḥāq does not connect the Syriac *munḥḥemana* of John 15:26 with the *aḥmad* of Q 61:6, a common practice of Muslim polemical writers. Cf. Watt, "The Early Development," 58; and A. Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop, "The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad," *The Muslim World* 41 (1951), 252f.

nection between Jesus and Muḥammad which can be found written in the Injīl itself.[19]

When Muḥammad begins his preaching in Makka, the leaders of the Quraysh send two representatives to Madīna to ask the Jewish rabbis about him, explaining, "for they are the first people of the scriptures and have knowledge which we do not possess about the prophets."[20] Later in Madīna, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām accepts Islam.[21] He is introduced as the rabbi of Banū Qaynuqāʿ and their "most learned man." ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām designs a ruse with Muḥammad in order to demonstrate his high standing among the Jews of Madīna as well as the deceitfulness and treachery of the Jews. When the Jews affirm the good reputation of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, he challenges them to accept the prophet of Islam. "By God you certainly know that he is the apostle of God. You find him written with you in the Torah by his name and his characteristics. I testify that he is the apostle of God, I believe in him, I hold him to be true, and I acknowledge him."[22] This story assumes a Torah in the possession of the Jews of Madīna in which the description of Muḥammad could be found. It also initiates Ibn Isḥāq's personification of the appropriate Jewish response to Muḥammad in the person of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām.[23]

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[19] In Ibn Isḥāq's account of Salman the Farsi, Salman travels to a location in Syria to meet an ascetic healer. In this strange story, the healer turns out to be Jesus, who promptly sends Salman to the Arabian prophet. *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 145–146.

[20] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 195. Wansbrough pointed out that the version of this story in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*, at Q 18:9, includes the prediction of Muḥammad in Jewish scripture (*Tafsīr Muqātil*, II, 574–576). The Quraysh say, "Tell us whether you find any mention of him in your scriptures." The Jews reply, "We do find him described (*naʿt*) as you say." *Quranic Studies*, 122 (*Tafsīr Muqātil*, II, 575).

[21] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 360–361.

[22] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 361. Ibn Hishām's version of the *Sīra* does not suggest a Torah prophecy of Muḥammad's coming as it does with the passage from the Gospel. However, Yūnus ibn Bukayr's record of Ibn Isḥāq's lectures contains just such a suggestion. Yūnus transmits a tradition that Umm al-Dardāʾ asked Kaʿb al-Ḥibr (*ḥibr* means something like 'Jewish scholar') what reference he found to the prophet of Islam in the Torah. Kaʿb al-Ḥibr answered, "We find Muhammad the apostle of God. His name is al-Mutawwakil. He is not harsh or rough; nor does he walk proudly in the streets. He is given the keys that by him God may make blind eyes see, and deaf ears hear, and set straight crooked tongues so that they bear witness that there is no god but God alone without associate. He will help and defend the oppressed." Guillaume provides this translation then characterizes it as a "garbled version" of Isaiah 42:2–7. "New Light on the Life of Muhammad," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Monograph No. 1 (Manchester University Press, n.d.), 32.

[23] The process of personification continues in *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 397–8, where ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām is presented along with three others as Jews who submitted,

An extended passage in the *Sīra* about Muḥammad and the Jews of Madīna offers a narrative framework for Sūra 2 as well as for many other passages in Sūras 3–5. In this section a large number of verses of tampering are touched on. How does the *Sīra*'s confidence in the earlier scriptures and the theme of a correspondence between those scriptures and the coming of Muḥammad relate to the *Sīra*'s treatment of the Qurʾānic verses of tampering?

On Q 2:75 Ibn Isḥāq relates basically the same story which Muqātil and Ṭabarī offer in their explanations of the verse.[24] The Jewish leaders hear the commands and prohibitions from God and understand them. But when they return with Moses to the people, a group of these leaders "changed (*ḥarrafa*) the commandments they had been given" by contradicting Moses and claiming that God had commanded something different. Ibn Isḥāq here glosses "the word of God" as "the Torah." However, the narrative he offers does not concern a text and its falsification, but rather only an audition of the voice of God and the verbal alteration of God's commandments when reporting them to the people.

In relation to Q 4:44–46 Ibn Isḥāq gives a very short narrative about a Jew who "twisted his tongue" when he spoke to the prophet of Islam.[25] He names the particular Jew as Rifāʿa ibn Zayd. Rifāʿa said, "give us your attention, Muḥammad, so that we can make you understand." Then he slandered (*ṭaʿana*) and dishonored (*ʿāba*) Islam. The focus of this story is on a verbal act of attacking Islam in the presence of Muḥammad.[26] There is no suggestion here of a text and its physical alteration.

Ibn Isḥāq does not link a narrative with Q 5:13, though he provides details of the "treachery" of the Jews against Muḥammad in relation to Q 5:11.[27] However, he provides a long narrative passage as the occasion of revelation of Q 5:41.[28] The story is substantially the same as the verse of stoning story found in Muqātil, ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ṭabarī. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā, introduced as "the most learned man living in the Torah," affirms that the Torah prescribes stoning for adulterers.

believed, and were earnest (*raghiba*) and firm (*rasakha*) in Islam. The disbelieving rabbis say that the converts are the very worst Jews because they have given up their ancestral religion. Ibn Isḥāq finds this to be the *sabab al-nuzūl* of Q 3:113: "Yet they are not all alike; some of the People of the Book are a nation upstanding, that recite God's signs in the watches of the night, bowing themselves." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 398.

[24] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 379.

[25] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 400–401.

[26] Cf. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 19.

[27] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 403.

[28] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 404–406.

He says that the Jews know that Muḥammad is a prophet sent by God, but don't want to acknowledge the truth because of envy. Here Ibn Isḥāq also attaches the story of a rabbi concealing the verse of stoning with his hand.[29] The prophet of Islam calls for a Torah to be brought out. When ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām removes the rabbi's hand from the page, the 'verse of stoning' is revealed.[30] Muḥammad says, "Woe to you Jews! What has induced you to abandon (*taraka*) the judgment of God which you hold in your hands (*bi-aydīkum*)?" The Jews explain how they agreed to "adjust" (*aṣlaḥa*) the punishment to flogging. The prophet of Islam then proclaims, "I am the first to revive the command (*amr*) of God and his book and its practice."[31] All of the parts of Ibn Isḥāq's narrative envision an intact Torah which can be produced and read aloud by Jewish Torah experts. Muḥammad's proclamation that he revives God's book appears to come out of a concept that the book is authentic and reliable—whether the book's custodians are trustworthy or not.

At several other points in his narratives about the response of the Jews of Madīna to Muḥammad, Ibn Isḥāq appears to be working from a concept of an intact and sound Torah. For example, he glosses Q 2:42, "do not conceal the knowledge which you have about my apostle and what he has brought when you will find it with you in what you know of the books which are in your hands."[32] The three Jewish tribes of Madīna shed each other's blood, "while the Torah was in their hands by which they knew what was allowed and what was forbidden."[33] In relation to Q 2:89–90, God's anger against the Jews is at "what they have disregarded of the Torah which they had" by disbelieving in the prophet of Islam.[34] The prophet wrote to the Jews of Khaybar that God has revealed the words of Q 48:29, "and you will find it in your scripture."[35] Here Ibn Isḥāq includes a rather remarkable

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[29] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406. Bukhārī attaches the same story to Q 3:93: "Bring the the Torah now and recite it, if you are truthful." *Saḥiḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. V, 170 (*kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, bāb 58).

[30] The role of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām as the one who caused the reader of the Torah to lift his hand from the stoning verse is discussed by Vajda in "Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṯ," 95.

[31] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406.

[32] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 376–377.

[33] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 382 (in explanation of Q 2:84–85).

[34] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 384.

[35] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 386. Wansbrough describes this as "a challenge to the addressees to acknowledge that Muhammad's prognosis was contained in Jewish scripture." *Sectarian Milieu*, 15.

challenge in Muḥammad's letter: "Do you find in what he has sent down to you that you should believe in Muḥammad? If you do not find that in your scripture then there is no compulsion (*kurh*) upon you."[36] In another story, the prophet of Islam enters a Jewish school and calls the Jews to God. In the ensuing exchange they disagree about the identity of Abraham, so Muḥammad says to the Jews, "Then let the Torah judge between us."[37] Ibn Isḥāq claims that this was the occasion of revelation of Q 3:23: "Hast thou not regarded those who were given a portion of the book, being called to the book of God, that it might decide between them, and then a party of them turned away, swerving aside?"[38] Abū Bakr invites a learned rabbi named Finḥās to Islam because the Jew "knew that Muḥammad was the apostle of God who had brought the truth from Him and that they would find it written in the Torah and the Gospel."[39] Near the end of this *Sīra* section on the Jews, a group of Jews puts the question to Muḥammad directly: "Is it true, Muḥammad, that what you have brought is the truth from God?" The prophet responds, "You know quite well that it is from God; you will find it written in the Torah which you have.... You know well that it is from God and that I am the apostle of God. You will find it written in the Torah you have."[40] The claim in all of these examples is that the Torah which is in the possession of the Jews of Madīna during the rule of Muḥammad there will confirm his status as a prophet of God and the divine origin of the recitations which he is giving.

Ibn Isḥāq also links narrative with several of the *katama* verses, and the theme of concealing seems to be an important part of his characterization of the Jews. Besides Q 2:42, mentioned earlier, he treats Q 2:159, 3:71, 3:187, and 4:37. As *sabab al-nuzūl* for Q 2:159, he tells a simple story about Arabs asking the Jewish rabbis about a matter contained in the Torah. The rabbis respond by concealing it from them and refusing (*abā*) to tell them anything about it.[41] Ibn Isḥāq's *asbāb* for the other three *katama* verses similarly appeal to the Jews to be

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[36] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 387. This statement seems to combine a confidence in the scripture of the Jews with a candid uncertainty about its contents.

[37] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 394.

[38] Cf. Hirschfeld, "Historical and legendary controversies," 105–106. This story appears frequently in works of both *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *tafsīr*. See for example Wāḥidī, *Asbab al-Nusūl*, 51–52.

[39] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 399.

[40] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 410.

[41] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 393.

honest about what they find in the Torah.[42] The most logical conclusion from these stories is that the Torah which the Jews are encouraged to consult is understood by Ibn Isḥāq to be the book which they have in their hands.[43]

A striking fact about the narratives Ibn Isḥāq offers about the Ahl al-Kitāb in the *Sīra* is the absence of any accusation of the falsification of the previous scriptures. In his section on references to the Jews in Sūrat al-Baqara, he offers no comments on Q 2:79, 3:78 or 5:13—which as we have seen seemed to trigger an accusation of falsification in Muqātil and Ṭabarī. This raises the question as to why the author of the *Sīra* did not use these verses in his narrative. If he had heard the accusation of falsification, why did he not include it in his characterization of the Jews of Madīna? There is little doubt that in this salvation history the Jews emerge as a deceitful, obstinate, indeed treacherous people. Did Ibn Isḥāq not consider the accusation of their falsification of the Torah helpful for his portrayal? Was he possibly not familiar with the accusation?

In this regard, Wansbrough's comment about the development of the theme of tampering in the *Sīra* is curious. He wrote, "One topos emerges as dominant: the Muslim charge of scriptural falsification (*taḥrīf*) and its corollary, supersession (*naskh*) by Islam of the Biblical dispensation granted to Israel.... The accusation is usually made *in foro externo* in circumstances calculated to reveal Jewish perfidy in failing to preserve the original of their own scriptures, because these had (!) contained prognosis of the Arabian prophet."[44] But where is the evidence in the *Sīra* for this remark? Wansbrough cited Ibn Isḥāq's treatment of Q 2:42 (*kitmān*), 2:59 (*tabdīl*) and 2:75 (*taḥrīf*). As has been shown above, Q 2:75 was connected in the *Sīra*—as in the commentaries—to the story of the Jewish leaders verbally contradicting Moses' report of the commands of God. The gloss of Q 2:42, mentioned earlier, seems to make the point that the Jews are concealing information about the prophet of Islam which they can readily find in the books which are in their own hands. Ibn Isḥāq treats Q 2:59 in the

[42] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 394, 400.

[43] On the *sabab al-nuzūl* in the *Sīra* for Q 2:159, Wansbrough wrote, "The 'concealment' (*kitmān*) topos became an important component of the Muslim charge that God's word had been distorted and abused in the hands of faithless custodians." *Sectarian Milieu*, 17. However, there is no indication of this in Ibn Isḥāq's treatment of the verse, nor elsewhere in the context of this passage in the *Sīra*.

[44] *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

context of God's dealings with the Children of Israel.[45] The Israelites said verbally something other than the '*ḥiṭṭa*' which God commanded them to say. None of these cases could be called a charge of scriptural falsification. There does not appear to be any hint in the *Sīra* section on the Jews of Madīna—the focus of Wansbrough's exploration—that the Jews possessed a corrupted scripture and that the claims that Ibn Isḥāq is making could only therefore be confirmed through access to some other "original" scriptures. "Jewish perfidy" is certainly a major theme in the *Sīra*, but Ibn Isḥāq does not demonstrate this by telling stories about the Jews' failure to preserve their scriptures. Rather, he portrays it by offering a narrative about Jewish obstinacy to acknowledge the truth about Muḥammad and what God revealed through him—which is clear from their own scriptures. Wansbrough added, "The use and abuse of 'scripture' was thus a polemical concept, adduced in support of the Muslim claim that God's salvific design had been achieved only with the revelation granted Muhammad."[46] Again, this is not the case in the *Sīra*. On the contrary, Ibn Isḥāq makes the claim that Muḥammad and the Qurʾān are part of God's salvific design on the basis of the attestation of Muḥammad in the early scriptures and the relationship of correspondence between the earlier scriptures and the new recitations. Wansbrough seemed to support Ibn Isḥāq's approach elsewhere when he wrote, "By its own express testimony, the Islamic kerygma was an articulation…of the Biblical dispensation, and can only thus be assessed."[47]

Conclusions

The *Sīra* treats a remarkable number of the same verses of tampering which were identified through scholarly indication and through the semantic field of tampering. Ibn Isḥāq provides a story of God's actions in history through the Arabian prophet, into which he inserts Qurʾānic verses of interaction and controversy with the People of the Book. From the other direction Muqātil, and to a certain extent Ṭabarī, provide interpretation for the vague and contextless verses of the Qurʾān by constructing above them a looming narrative frame-

[45] *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 377.
[46] *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.
[47] *Sectarian Milieu*, 45.

work. In both cases, the narrative favors the scenario of a variety of tampering actions revolving around an intact Torah.

In setting out to write salvation history for the Muslim community, Ibn Isḥāq was looking to portray continuity with the prophets of the Jewish and Christian communities and to demonstrate attestation from the scriptures of those communities. Continuity and attestation are elements of a narrative framework which works against the concept of a corrupted scripture in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna. In fact, Ibn Isḥāq claims repeatedly that the book in the hands of the Jews will attest to the prophet of Islam. The narrative framework of the *Sīra* excludes not only traditions of textual falsification, but also the Qurʾānic verses which seem to trigger the accusation in Muqātil's and Ṭabarī's commentaries.

Exegetes of scripture do not have the option to exclude verses from their works of *tafsīr*. However, they interpret the verses according to independent structures—some internal and some external. In explaining the tampering verses, two internal structures which guide the exegete are the material in the Qurʾān on the earlier scriptures and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. For Muqātil and Ṭabarī, an important external structure was the narrative framework of Jewish resistance to the authority of the prophet of Islam. The examination of the 25 tampering passages plus many other passages in the commentaries has provided many glimpses of the outlines of this narrative structure. Calder's insight into the power of narrative in Ṭabarī's exegetical method is supported by an abundance of material in the commentaries. The narrative framework influences the two exegetes to interpret the tampering verses mainly in the direction of actions of tampering which assume an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews.

The influence of the narrative structure suggests a reason for why, though Muqātil and Ṭabarī cite a number of falsification traditions, these traditions remain isolated in the commentaries; and why the treatment of the falsification accusation by Ṭabarī and his forebears has been characterized by scholars as reluctant,[48] cautious,[49] guarded,[50] careful,[51] and gentle.[52]

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[48] Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 105.

[49] Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 419.

[50] Khoury, *Polemique byzantine contre l'Islam*, 210.

[51] Hermann Stieglecker, "Die muhammedanische Pentateuchkritik zu Beginn des 2. Jahrtausends," *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 88 (1935), 75.

[52] Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57.

On the other hand, by contrast, Muqātil and Ṭabarī narrated a wide variety of stories of tampering by the People of the Book with creativity and great abandon. Most of the members of these communities of the earlier scriptures are found to be deceptive and obstinate. The negative qualities of Jews and Christians are highlighted in the commentaries by actions of inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam despite the clear information about him in the books in their possession.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: RELIGIOUS CLAIMS AND HUMAN RESPONSE

This study set out to demonstrate the development of the theme of "tampering with the earlier scriptures" by exegetes in the formative period of Qurʾānic commentary. This goal has been achieved by a close examination and analysis of passages from the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. The passages chosen for special focus were exegetical treatments of the verses in the Qurʾān which have traditionally been linked with the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of earlier scriptures. A set of 25 'tampering verses' were found at the intersection of the lists offered in scholarly studies of Muslim polemic and the Qurʾān's semantic field of tampering. The description and analysis of the exegesis of these verses in the two commentaries culminated in summary statements of how the exegetes understood the Qurʾānic verbs in the semantic field of tampering as well as several other scriptural expressions associated with the Muslim accusation of falsification.

Examination and analysis of the commentary passages has shown that the exegetes of the formative period did not in the first instance understand the Qurʾānic verses of tampering to mean the textual corruption of the earlier scriptures. Rather, they interpreted the verses to mean a range of actions of tampering done mainly by Jews, mainly contemporary with the prophet of Islam, and mainly related to the Torah. The Qurʾānic verses themselves are not at all clear as to actor and action, locus and object of tampering. The exegetes aim to identify the 'vague and ambiguous' references of the text of scripture. By the time of Ṭabarī there is a clearly a range of interpretive traditions, and some disagreement, about the meaning of the verses of tampering. The exegetes explain several of the tampering verses by telling stories from the ancient history of the Children of Israel. They explain other verses by telling stories about the interaction between the Jews of Madīna and the prophet of Islam. The exegetes transmit traditions about the Jewish alteration of the Torah. These traditions seem to be linked in the commentaries with Q 2:79, and also attach to exegetical treatment of 3:78 and 5:13. The alteration traditions, however, are overshadowed in the commentaries by more dominant tampering traditions which

assume the existence of authentic scriptures in the hands of Jews and Christians.

Muqātil and Ṭabarī understood the verses of tampering to refer to a variety of actions by the People of the Book in response to the prophet of Islam. Prominent among these is the concealment of information about Muḥammad in the Torah and the Gospel. Instead of publicizing this information to those of their community who cannot read, the Jewish leaders remain silent about it, or deny it when asked. The Jews also insult the prophet and his religion by a devious use of words. They neglect the Torah commands and even lay some rulings aside in preference to more lenient punishments. Instead of acknowledging the Torah commands, they deceive Muḥammad and devise tests designed to cast doubt on his prophethood. The understanding of *taḥrīf* shown by Muqātil and Ṭabarī in their exegesis of most of the tampering verses is neither the *taḥrīf al-maʿnā* nor the *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* of the classical discussions.

In answer to the question of why Muqātil and Ṭabarī should have explained the tampering verses in this way, a number of independent structures were identified and their operation explained. Three internal structures which were seen to guide the exegetes in their interpretations are the wordings of Muslim scripture, the contexts of the tampering passages in the commentaries, and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. From outside the exegesis of scripture, a structure which influences the interpretation of the tampering verses in these commentaries is the narrative framework of Jewish response to the prophet of Islam.

The wording of the Qurʾān on the earlier scriptures makes it difficult—with consistency—for the exegetes to speak of those scriptures as if they exist in a corrupted state. The material on the earlier scriptures in the Qurʾān is uniformly positive and respectful. Most of this material appears in Sūras 2–7. The earlier scriptures are portrayed there as touchstones of authority and attestation. The explicit claim repeated throughout these *sūra*s is that the revelation sent down to the messenger confirms the revelation sent down before it and now in existence 'with' the People of the Book. In these very same *sūra*s, and often in near contexts, occur verbs and expressions of tampering which create a mood of anxiety about how the People of the Book are handling the revelation which God granted to them. A survey of all of these materials showed that favorable descriptions of the earlier scriptures alternate with verbs from the semantic field of tampering and a number of idiomatic expressions associated with tampering.

Exegesis of verses which contain these verbs and expressions shows a preoccupation with actions of deception such as concealing words of the earlier scriptures which describe the person and arrival of the prophet of Islam. This is partly a function of the Qurʾānic material, both in quantity and canonical sequence. For example, of the 11 tampering verses in the second Sūra, six contain verbs of concealing. But beyond the words of scripture, the frequent exegetical portrayal of scenarios of deception has an impact on other contexts in the commentaries. Stories of deception are based on an understanding that the tampering is related to an intact text of the earlier scriptures. When the exegetes treat verses containing verbs of alteration, therefore, they may have the concealing passages in mind and will possibly consider the question of consistency. As seen above, the language of dishonesty and concealing thus tends also to slip into the exegesis of the *ḥarrafa* verses.

This phenomenon of seeking consistency with both scriptural wordings and other exegetical contexts is an aspect of the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. Muslim scholars writing in other genres are not bound to ensure that their use of the Qurʾān matches what the Qurʾān says about the subject in other passages. The polemicist, for example, will use those scriptural materials which appear to best support his argument, and will simply leave other materials unmentioned. Even if the polemicist is aware that the argument he is making does not match the main thrust of scripture, he may be able to exploit the ignorance of the wider context among his readers. The writer of a commentary does not have this option. The scriptural materials which work against a specious argument are necessarily contained in the same book. In the case of the tampering motif, if the exegete wants to write at one point that the Jews conceal the references to Muḥammad in an intact Torah in their hands, and at another point that the Torah in the hands of the Jews is corrupt, he will escape the objections of an alert reader only through great ingenuity.

Muqātil and Ṭabarī, however, not only explained the text of scripture according to internal structures, but also according to external structures. Their exegesis of the tampering verses gave unmistakable indications of larger concerns which go beyond the motif of tampering. An examination of literary devices in the commentaries in chapter six revealed the existence of a narrative framework looming over the exegesis of the individual tampering verses. The particular narrative structure which emerges from the tampering passages in the commentaries is the story of Jewish response to Muslim truth

claims concerning the prophethood of Muḥammad and the provenance of the recitations which he brought. The Jewish response is portrayed as mainly negative. The commentaries' overriding concern to demonstrate the authority of Muḥammad and its unreasonable rejection tends to put the tampering motif into the service of the larger narrative. The question was then posed as to whether the narrative structure may be seen to influence the interpretation of the tampering verses.

A case for narrative influence was made with the assistance of scholarly insights into the exegetical method of Muqātil and the importance of narrative for Ṭabarī. The intention to demonstrate the authority of Muḥammad, it was argued, would determine the exegetical approach to the tampering materials in several respects. First of all, the attestation to the messenger and his message would be sought in the earlier scriptures. Secondly, the rulings of the messenger would be seen to be in line with the rulings of the earlier scriptures. Thirdly, the people who possess the earlier scriptures would be made clearly culpable by their disregard of the truth in their hands. Fourthly, those Jews who respond appropriately to the prophet of Islam would be portrayed as dealing honestly with the earlier scriptures as they knew them. This case for narrative influence on the exegesis of the tampering verses was tested on another early work, the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq, in chapter seven. In the *Sīra*, the narrative is the central concern, and verses from the Qurʾān are brought in to serve the story. The treatment of the tampering verses in the *Sīra* showed a clear concern to demonstrate all four aspects of the above approach. It was observed that not only does the *Sīra* lack an accusation of the falsification of the earlier scriptures, but that it does not even make use of the verses which are associated with the accusation in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī.

In this way, the narrative structure of Jewish response to Muḥammad was seen to be an essential part of the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries. The exegetes took this external structure seriously when they interpreted the tampering verses. They considered a story of dishonesty about—and rejection of—an existing scriptural attestation to the prophetic status of Muḥammad more helpful in advancing the larger narrative concern than a story about falsification of scripture. They developed the tampering motif according to this larger narrative concern.

As for the passages in the commentaries that indicate an accusation of textual falsification, the exegetes were familiar with traditions

that employed verbs of deletion and addition to specify the tampering action. Muqātil understood at Q 2:79 and 3:78 a Jewish action of erasing and writing. At the same verses, Ṭabarī attributed strong verbs of deletion and addition to others, while himself using a verb of addition at Q 3:78. The isolated nature of these traditions in the commentaries was noted. In the context of the 25 tampering passages in the two commentaries examined in detail in this study, the accusations of textual falsification seem out of place. Indeed, the near contexts of those two particular passages in the commentaries do not prepare the reader for an accusation of textual falsification.

The exegetical method of Muqātil was clearly seen to be 'haggadic' or narrative. For Muqātil the story was always in view. Many of the literary devices that he used in his exegesis have been identified and illustrated in this study. However, Ṭabarī's exegetical approach was seen to be quite different from Muqātil's. Ṭabarī demonstrates a lively interest in the linguistic, juridical and theological implications of Muslim scripture. He pursues questions of Arabic syntax and grammar that Muqātil passed over in silence. In the case of the tampering verses, Ṭabarī provides helpful definitions of key terms where Muqātil seems to assume understanding or at most simply glosses the terms. Ṭabarī also provides a polyvalent reading of scripture through the citation of many traditions, while Muqātil's single interpretation of each verse could be called monovalent.

The extent of the importance of narrative and its function in Ṭabarī's commentary—in comparison to that of Muqātil—was queried at the beginning of chapter five. In Ṭabarī's interpretation of the tampering verses, narrative exegesis was seen to be his main methodology. The most striking example of this is his extensive exegesis of Q 5:41. There he recounts story after story of Muḥammad's ruling on adultery without pausing to discuss the legal questions. For other Muslim scholars, the lack of a "verse of stoning" in the Qurʾān posed a difficult dilemma between *sunna* and scripture. But Ṭabarī makes no mention of this anomaly at Q 5:41. There is no cross reference to Q 24:2. In fact, the only scripture referred to is the Torah, and the stories repeatedly show Muḥammad giving a judgment on adultery in line with that earlier scripture. A major concern of these stories is certainly the authority of the prophet of Islam. But it is not authority in the sense of demonstrating that *sunna* establishes Islamic Law. Rather, the narrative concern is to establish the prophetic authority of Muḥammad by showing his ruling to be coterminous with divine revelation in the past. In this

sense, Ṭabarī's passages of narrative exegesis fulfill the same function as those of Muqātil.

In summary, Muqātil and Ṭabarī did not in the first instance understand from the words of the Qurʾān that Jews and Christians had falsified their scriptures. The passages in which they make or transmit accusations of falsification remain isolated and tentative. This raises the question as to how the Muslim understanding changed to the point where the doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures became the dominant Islamic position. The answer to this question goes beyond the scope of this study. However, the results of this study suggest directions which may be fruitfully pursued in further research.

One reason for the change in approach may be the needs of polemic. As the new religion emerged in the midst of the strong and established traditions of Judaism and Christianity, there was a need for Islam to set itself apart from the older traditions. Even here, early Muslim polemic shows a concern to prove the claims of the new religion by showing it to be a fulfillment of prophecy in the earlier scriptures. But in the midst of heated exchanges with the conquered populations, in which confident and well-educated Jews and Christians denied Muslim claims on the basis of their respective scriptures, it came to be seen as extremely convenient—no doubt for some irresistible—to accuse the opponent of possessing a corrupted scripture. As the Christian Arab al-Kindi is reported to have said when on the receiving end of this polemic: "I do not know that I have found an argument more difficult to dislodge, more desperate to disarm than this which you advance as to the corruption of the sacred text."[1]

Thus the claim was made that the Qurʾān had been perfectly preserved from the moment God sent it down on Muḥammad, while the People of the Book had allowed their books to become corrupt or indeed had intentionally falsified the books themselves.

Another reason for the strengthening of accusations of textual falsification may be developments in the Islamic concept of authority. The commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, and other early works such as Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra*, are concerned to establish the prophetic author-

[1] "The Apology of al-Kindi," in *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries (632–900 A.D.)*, N.A. Newman, ed. (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 498.

ity of Muḥammad by showing its attestation from divine revelation in the past. A new religion which is emerging in the Middle East in the midst of strong and ancient religious traditions will need to measure itself against what exists. The Muslim categories of deity, prophet and book were the categories of Judaism and Christianity. In order to be understood in this milieu, Muḥammad must be portrayed as a prophet in a line of prophets which stretches back through Biblical history to Adam. Initially, there was no way for Islam to establish claims of authority other than in terms of the older religious traditions. If Islam wanted to establish authority in these terms, however, it would need to refer to the revelations of the past and would tend to speak of those revelations in a favorable way. An accusation of the wholesale corruption of the earlier scriptures prior to the emergence of Islam would eliminate the possibility of proof of the essential attestation which those scriptures provide.

If Islam then goes through a process of establishing authority in the *sunna* of Muḥammad, the approach to the earlier scriptures may change correspondingly. The words and behavior of the prophet of Islam, as interpreted from the *ḥadīth* collections, become the foundation for Islamic Law. The respect for earlier scriptures may continue, perhaps because of knowledge of their descriptions in the Qurʾān. Indeed, they may continue to be referenced, when convenient, in polemic to argue that Muḥammad's advent was prophesied. However, the role of the earlier scriptures as bases of authority has changed. The Muslim community has accepted the *sunna* as the completely adequate foundation. The props which were earlier deemed essential are no longer needed. They could be knocked out from under the edifice because the edifice now stands firm on another foundation. In this scenario—in which the need for attestation from the earlier scriptures disappears—Muslim scholars are free to boldly advance the accusations of textual falsification among the exegetical traditions. Language of confirmation and correspondence between the Qurʾān and the earlier scriptures can also give way to language of abrogation and supersession.

A third possible explanation for the increasing frequency of accusations of textual falsification is the hardening of theological understandings in Islam. It was noted in chapter seven that Ṭabarī, after considering many conflicting traditions about the identity of the son of Abraham's intended sacrifice, asserted that the son was Isaac. Muqātil before him had identified the son as Isaac without indicating awareness of any other option. Both exegetes were free to consider the reliability

of stories from Jews, or reports about the narrative in the Torah, that Isaac was the son involved. With time, however, the Islamic understanding of the identity of the son leaned heavily toward Ishmael. If—when this understanding became established as orthodox—Muslims were to discover that the son in the Torah is unequivocally Isaac, how would they tend to approach the text of the Torah?

This process of reasoning was in fact repeated frequently in the first major statement of the doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures, provided by Ibn Ḥazm. The understanding that God must not be described with anthropomorphic language had become established in Muslim orthodoxy. Therefore, if the reader finds anthropomorphic language for God in the present Torah, its text must necessarily be corrupt, according to Ibn Ḥazm. Similarly, the doctrine of the sinlessness of prophets had become part of orthodox Muslim theology. If the Torah was then discovered to contain narratives of important Biblical figures committing sins such as lying, adultery and murder, the Torah must have been falsified. Ibn Ḥazm pioneered the method of arguing the corruption of the Bible by judging it according to doctrinaire Muslim theological understandings. Hartwig Hirschfeld characterized this kind of criticism as "dictated by a combination of dogma and *odium theologicum*."[2]

In this way a greater familiarity with the actual contents of the Bible among Muslims, which might have provided opportunities for irenic interaction with Jews and Christians, became a source of harsh polemic against the earlier scriptures and their allegedly careless custodians. Ibn Ḥazm thought it sufficient proof of corruption to quote Q 48:29 ("That is their likeness in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel…") and note that nothing like this was to be found in the existing Torah and Gospel. But the major test of authenticity continued to be the statement in Q 7:157 that the *ummī* prophet could be found recorded in the Torah and Gospel, and the claim that this referred to Muḥammad. Al-Maqdisī made his case for the alteration of the text of the Torah precisely to encourage Muslims who had heard from Jews and Christians that Muḥammad is not mentioned there.

Some scholars have suggested that the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures may have come from similar motifs in operation among other religious communities in the Middle East. This

[2] "Mohammedan Criticism of the Bible," 234.

is an attractive proposal, and a reasonable one. Certainly Christian scholars prior to Islam queried discrepancies between the Septuagint and some other Jewish Greek translations. Samaritan scholars contested the text of the Hebrew Bible. Pharisees and Sadducees, Karaites and Ebionites also made accusations. But evidence to support the claim that these controversies in other communities were adopted and adapted by Muslim scholars has thus far not been supplied. Whatever Ibn Isḥāq may have known in the second Islamic century about the use of standard polemical *topoi* in other religious communities, he did not in fact make an accusation of the falsification of earlier scriptures in the *Sīra*. In the case of Ibn Ḥazm in the fifth Islamic century, the motivation for his blistering polemic against the Bible seems to have come not from what he heard about accusations of falsification among Jews and Christians, but rather from what he heard about an attack on the coherence of the Qurʾān by a Spanish Jew.

Other scholars have pursued indications in Muslim tradition that there was sufficient uncertainty about the text of the Qurʾān among Muslims to make outside influence on the doctrine of *taḥrīf* unnecessary. One axis of intra-Muslim polemic was Shīʿī accusations that references to ʿAlī and his family had been deleted from Muslim scripture. However, another source of anxiety was the very question of punishment for adultery which the exegetes of this study raised at Q 5:41. A group of traditions reports ʿUmar as saying that a "verse of stoning" had been sent down upon the prophet of Islam, and that the Muslims had recited it. The mystery of why this punishment did not then make its way into the canonical text, particularly when there was general agreement about its status as *sunna*, preoccupied a generation of legal scholars. Surely John Burton is right when he finds "refreshing irony in witnessing one group of people who have replaced a flogging penalty that is in the Book of God by a stoning penalty, vilifying a second group of people for replacing a stoning penalty that is in the Book of God by a flogging penalty."[3]

An alternative theme which takes into account the dynamic of many religious communities, and one which seems to better suit the findings of this research, is the theme of religious truth claims and human response. A close study of the exegetical treatments of the tampering verses has revealed a narrative structure of Jewish response to Muslim

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[3] "Law and Exegesis," 282.

claims about the prophet of Islam. The tampering motif is a function of response to truth claims. The claims concern Muḥammad's status as a true prophet and 'sent one' from God, and the divine origin of the recitations which he made. The right response, as portrayed in the commentaries, is to believe in Muḥammad, attest to the truth of his claim to prophethood, acknowledge that what he brought was from God, and follow and obey him. The claims are clear, and the response seemingly straightforward. Some of the People of the Book respond positively on the basis of the scriptures in their possession. However, most of them disbelieve and deny the Muslim truth claims about Muḥammad. In other words, they are divided over him. At this point the Muslim story is very close to what happens in other religious contexts and, indeed, to what is recorded in major world scriptures.

This suggests a direction for future scholarly exploration. How do communities of differing, even conflicting, faith commitments deal with the rejection of their claims by others? How do they express those truth claims in their source documents? How do they portray the rejection of those claims by others? Are disbelievers shown to be making a free response on the basis of adequate information? Is there a respect for individual freedom to respond positively or negatively? What do source documents or religious traditions put forward as the consequence of rejection? Is consequence limited to a pronouncement of the curse of deity, or an assurance of reckoning on the Judgment Day? Or does it also include a threat of chastisement in this lifetime? If so, what is the extent of this-worldly punishment for negative response to truth claims: does it envision exile, imprisonment, assassination… slaughter? These and other questions point toward not only possibilities for fruitful scholarly investigation, but also to the hope of meaningful interfaith conversation in today's world.

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